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1902

THE LOVERS' BATTLE

HEROICAL COMEDY

In Rhyne

Founded upon

ALEXANDER POPE'S
"RAPE OF THE LOCK"

By CLOTILDE GRAVES

BRENTANOS, Publishers
Union Square, New York, 1902





Class

Book

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THE LOVERS' BATTLE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

110 lines of Pope's Poem have been respectfully incorporated in the Play, and are indicated where they occur by bracketts.

THE LOVERS' BATTLE

HEROICAL COMEDY
In Rhyme

Founded upon

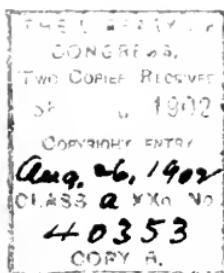
ALEXANDER POPE'S

"RAPE OF THE LOCK"

By CLOTILDE GRAVES

BRENTANOS, Publishers

Union Square, New York, 1902



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AMERICAN PRINTING HOUSE
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NEW YORK

To

MY BROTHER HUGH

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY.

IMMORTALS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| ARIEL..... | } <i>Sylphs attendant on Belinda.</i> |
| BRILLIANTE..... | |
| MOMENTILLA..... | |
| CRISPILLA | |
| ZEPHYRETTO..... | |
| TASSELLIO..... | } <i>In the shape of A Spiteful Gnome.</i> |
| UMBRIEL..... | |
| POMPEY | |

of } *A Negro Page.*

MORTALS

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| LORD PETER..... | } <i>A young Gentleman of Quality, President of the Sparks' Club, and Suitor to Belinda.</i> |
| COLONEL POYNTZ..... | |
| ALEXANDER POPE..... | <i>Of the Sparks' Club. His Friend: The Poet. In love with Belinda.</i> |
| SIR PLUME TOPINOTT..... | <i>A young Gentleman of Quality. In love with himself.</i> |
| THE MARQUESS OF FOPTOWN | } <i>Beaux about town. Members of The Sparks' Club and Suitor to Belinda.</i> |
| SIR CHARLES DAPPERWIT.... | |
| PARVISOL..... | <i>A Fashionable French Hairdresser</i> |
| DOCTOR JONATHAN SWIFT.... | <i>Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin.</i> |
| SLEEKING..... | <i>A Valet.</i> |

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY.

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| LADY TOPINOTT..... | <i>Aunt to Belinda.</i> |
| BETTY..... | <i>A Maid.</i> |
| CLARISSA..... | <i>Young Ladies of Quality.</i> |
| LUCINDA..... | <i>A Rich Widow. In love with Sir Plume.</i> |
| SACHARISSA..... | <i>An Heiress, and the Toad of the Town.</i> |
| BELINDA FERMOR..... | <i>BRAUX, BRILLES NOTABLES, CELEBRITIES, SPARKS, FOOTMEN, VALETS, &c.</i> |

ACT I.

SCENE.—*Belinda's Bedchamber at Topinott House, Berkeley Square.*

ACT II

SCENE.—*A Riverside Bowling-green with Pavilions, Hampton Court.*

ACT III

SCENE I.—*Belinda's Bedchamber:*

SCENE II.—*Lord Petre's Lodgings in St. James's.*

ACT IV

SCENE.—*The Ball-Room, Queensberry House.*

PLACE.—*London.* PERIOD.—A. D. 1718.

The Events of the Play are supposed to occur within the space of One Day.

THE LOVERS' BATTLE.

ACT I

THE VOICES OF THE SYLPHS

*[Heard singing in the distance, to an accompaniment of
fairy harps].*

I.

SOL through closed curtains darts
A golden ray!
Open, ye lovely eyes!
Rival the azure skies!
Eclipse the day!
Awake! imperious Sultaness of hearts!

2.

[The song swells louder as the SYLPHS draw near.]

Arise, in all thy charms!
Thy guardian sprites
We wait to lend our aid—
The toilet stands displayed—
Begin the rites!

Let awful Beauty put on all its arms!

THE CURTAIN rises, disclosing BELINDA'S bedchamber, an elegant apartment lined with rose silk, painted in panels with groups of Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses.

The hour is 12 A.M. The blinds of the high windows are drawn, and a chastened light prevails. In an alcove stands a splendid Arabian bed, veiled by closely drawn curtains of crumpled rose silk and lace. Near the head of the bed is a small table, bearing a china posset-cup and a silver hand-bell. The fireplace is of carved white marble, with agate plaques, and the high mantelshelf supports some Sèvres vases, an

ormolu chiming-clock, and a pair of crystal candelabra containing wax tapers which have been partly burned away.

Double doors lead to an ante-room. Another door, gilded and silk-panelled, appertains to a powder-closet or dressing-cabinet. In the upper part of this door is a sash-window by which communication may be had with a person within.

A lace-veiled toilet-table, laden with crystal and gilt plate. Upon it a jewel-case. Near it is a small couch. A writing-table stands near the centre of the room, rather to the right; close to it is an elbow-chair.

A tabouret, a large cabinet in tortoiseshell buhl, some Pekin cases. Near the fireplace is a miniature kennel, in basket-work, in which a Maltese poodle lies sleeping. A macaw, chained to a glided stand, also sleeps, its head beneath its wing.

The clock upon the mantelshelf chimes twelve.

The buhl cabinet becomes transparent, irradiated from interior by a mysterious golden glow. Its doors open and ARIEL emerges. He is a winged sylph of exquisite beauty, costumed in blue, pink, and silver, as a Beau of the Period, with flaxen periwig, red heels, a sword and ruffles.

ARIEL.

Ye sylphs and sylphids! Denizens of Air!
My summons hear and hitherwards repair!

THE SYLPHS

[Chanting in distance].

We come, great Ariel!

[The music of fairy harps, in rippling cadences gradually swelling to a crescendo. The magical golden glow spreads and intensifies, filling the chamber with dazzling radiance. In the light the shapes of the SYLPHS, at first transparent and diaphanous, gradually assume distinctness. They are fragile creatures of delicate and child-like loveliness, in height and size resembling children of human birth. All are attired in the extremest fashion of the day; their hair curled and frizzed, and like their gauzy wings,

sparkling as though powdered with dust of diamonds.]

ARIEL.

The sun has climbed

To the high zenith, and the clock has chimed
The magic hour when yawning lap-dogs shake
Their jingling bells, and sleepless lovers wake!

ZEPHYRETTO

[*Moving towards the bed*].

Shall I perform my office and arouse
With a breath'd kiss between her arching brows
Our lovely charge?

ARIEL.

Hold! Sylphs, be it confessed

'Tis my enchantment thus prolongs her rest!

'Twas I who cast about Belinda's bed
The drowsy spell that hovers o'er her head!

Behold!

[*At a sign from ARIEL, the bed-curtains rise and dispose themselves in graceful festoons, revealing BELINDA, a beautiful, fresh, and innocent-looking girl of twenty-two, asleep upon lace-trimmed pillows, in a gauze negligée, amidst the superb chestnut tresses of her luxuriant hair.*]

Where panoplied in awful charms

The nymph reposes! Must I with alarms
Quicken the breaths that softly come and go,
And vex that shell-like ear with whispers low
Of threatened doom?

[*The SYLPHS shrink in terror.*]

BRILLIANTE

[*Mournfully*].

Alas!

ZEPHYRETTO

[*Trembling*].

With fear I quake!

MOMENTILLA

[*Imploringly*].

Most puissant master, we conjure you—speak!

ARIEL.

This day black omens threat the brightest fair
That ere deserved a watchful spirit's care!

BRILLIANTE.

Some dire disaster?

ZEPHYRETTO.

Wrought by force, or sleight?

ARIEL.

What 'tis, and where, the Fates have wrap'd in night!
Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,

[*The SYLPHS conceal their faces.*]

Or some frail China jar receive a flaw;
Whether she stain her honor or brocade,
Forget her prayers,—or miss a masquerade!
Or lose her heart,—or necklace—at a ball,
Or whether 'tis decreed that—

[*He indicates the sleeping Maltese.*]

SYLPHS

[*Screaming*].

Shock—?

ARIEL.

[*Struggling with emotion*].

—Must fall!—

Slain by some butcher's cur in rabid rage,
Crushed 'neath the wheels of some gay equipage,
Stolen, or lost, to wander far from ease,
Cushions and cream,—devoured by vulgar fleas;
Fed on the thrice-picked bone, or gutter-scrap—
Unwashed,—uncombed,—a lap-dog *sans* a lap. . . .

[*The SYLPHS sink prostrate, weeping.*]

I know not! Yet [Approaching the bed.]
ere these fringed eyelids rise,

And the bright world is brighter for thine eyes,
Fairest of mortals, hear my warning voice!
Belinda danger threatens!

BELINDA

[*Dreaming*].

La! how choice!

ARIEL

[*Kissing her*].

Belinda!

BELINDA

[*Drowsily*].

I protest . . . 'tis really! . . .

If this be dreaming—and 'tis dreaming, sure,
Let no one wake me!

ARIEL.

Thou distinguished care
Of us, the bright inhabitants of Air—
Hear and believe me, who attention claim,
Thy guardian sprite!

BELINDA

[*Rapturously*].

Ah!

ARIEL.

Ariel is my name!
Late as I roamed the crystal wilds of Air,
In the clear mirror of thy ruling star
I saw, alas! some dread event impend
Ere to the main this morning's sun descend!
Be guarded: tempt no stroke of Destiny
By word incautious or by act too free—
Let no rash vow upon thy tongue take shape,
Lest Honor be involved beyond escape:
This to disclose is all thy guardian can,
Beware of all—but most! beware of Man!

THE SYLPHS

[*Together, warningly*].

Beware of Man!

[*The fairy harps are again heard. As BELINDA wakes, the forms of the SYLPHS gradually become indistinct; they mingle with the atmosphere and are no more seen. The mysterious golden glow fades, the ordinary morning sunshine penetrates through the blinds, street noises are heard from without.*]

BELINDA

[*Sitting up in bed, rubbing her eyes*].

Of all men, or of a

Man, do you counsel—? Mercy! 'tis broad day!
The darling vision's vanished quite—heigho! . . .

Of a youth, glittering like a birthnight beau,
 Who to my ear his winning lips inclined,
 And named himself— [She rings the silver bell.]
 I cannot bring to mind
 What was't?

[Ringing again and knocking on the floor with her slipper.]

But now I had it on my tongue
 Betty! [Calling.] What! Betty!

[BETTY, a pretty, smartly dressed young waiting-woman, with a country accent, enters with chocolate upon a tray.]

BETTY.

Madam!

BELINDA.

Thrice I've rung!

BETTY.

Nay, surely, Madam?

BELINDA.

Ay! thou lazy chit!

Nor though you heard me, would you heed one whit
 When footman Sam was ogling in your face!

BETTY

[Putting the tray on the table near the couch].
 I scorns the hudget, spite of his gold lace!
 But mun! a scolding ever be my vate!
 Though I but stayed to mill your chocolate!

BELINDA

[Rising].

Reach me my gown!

[BETTY envelops her in a loose robe.]

Give me my slippers now!

Pour out the chocolate . . . stone-cold, I vow!

BETTY

[Drawing the curtains so as to conceal the bed
 in the alcove].

Nay, mun! 'tis boiling!

BELINDA

[Sitting on the couch].

Give some cream to Shock,
 And Poll a lump of sugar. What's o'clock?

BETTY

[*Drawing up the window blinds*].

Twelve, by Church dial!

BELINDA

[*Sipping chocolate*].

Is the weather fair?

What day is it? The almanac lies there,

Reach it me, pray!

[BETTY hands her the almanac and goes out, carrying the poodle.]

Can a whole month have flown

Since first I made my curtsey to the Town?

Am I that same Belinda, once content

To dwell in dulness down in dismal Kent

Play cribbage with my grandmother, or brag,

And drive to church behind a bob-tail'd nag?

Knowing no keener joys—no wider range—

Till a rich kinsman, well known upon 'Change,

Died, leaving me, in lack of other heirs,

Full twenty thousand in Potosi shares!

O! rainbowed world that then appear'd to sight!

I spread my gilded wings and took to flight.

Arrived in town, how pleas'd my lady Aunt

The long-neglected tie of blood to vaunt,

Play chaperon, nor leave one thing undone

To wed the heiress to Sir Plume, her son!

Meanwhile Belinda has become the rage!

Copied my modes, my fads, my equipage,

As regnant belle none dares dispute my state,

The Wits' Club toast me, and the Sparks' Club fête!

Life, once a psalm, is now a lively jig,

And I join in as merry as a grig!

To the gay tune a frolic toe I shake . . .

Dance, dine, dress, play;—were I a man I'd rake!

[*A knock at the door*.]

Who knocks?

THE VOICE OF POMPEY

[*Outside*].

Me, Missis!

BELINDA.

Enter, Blackamoor!

[POMPEY, a knowing-looking negro child, dressed in crimson and gold, with a turban and jewelled collar, enters, carrying a silver salver, on which are a dozen billets of different colors and sizes. He goes to BELINDA and kneels, offering the salver.]

What, are these all? Have I grown plain, or poor,
Tell me, thou sable imp, since yesternight?

[Picking out a billet with an enclosure.]

O Lud! His hand. . . . I know it not by sight. . . .
How my heart beats, and blushes blushes chase. . . .

[Tearing the billet open.]

From my Lord Foptown . . . with a tweezer-case!

[Contemptuously.]

“Marriage! a jointure!” Of love, more or less
You make no mention here, my lord Marquess!

[She throws the billet aside and opens another.]

This from a coxcomb, Sir Charles Dapperwit;
He offers me a hand, with nought in it!

That were of little moment, Sir, be it said,
Were your heart better furnished—or your head!

[Rapidly tearing open billet after billet.]

Proposals! Offers! Declarations all
From high and low, from lean, stout, short and tall!
From plain and handsome. I could weep for spite,

[Shuffling the billets angrily together in her lap.]
Twelve Mister Wrongs, and not one Mister Right!

[Heaping billets pettishly back on the salver.]
So, manikin [to POMPEY], this cloying dish remove!

POMPEY.

Iss, Missis! [He sets the salver on a side table].

BELINDA.

Pompey, know'st thou, what is Love?

POMPEY

[Grinning].

Pompey lub toffee, but no money got!

BELINDA

[Throwing him a piece of money].

Joys saccharine are purchased for a groat,
Go, buy—be happy!

POMPEY

[*Bitting the coin*].
Me lub Missis now!

BELINDA.

Avaunt! thou mercenary bantling!

[POMPEY turns a somersault and runs out.]
How!

Is not one nature formed to stand the test
Of money—universal alkahest? [Rising.]

Yes, yes, but one!—it reigns supreme,—alone
Jove-like, immortal, on a cloud-wrap'd throne!
He,—he,—that he whom riches most adorn
Yet looks on riches with the loftiest scorn!
Despises rank, though on his brow was set
Three centuries back—a Baron's coronet!
Petre—by sordid lucre all unwon,
Who loves Belinda for herself alone!
Petre! on whom my soul forever calls,—
And ne'er shall know the hour when Petre palls!
When first we met, it seemed to me he frowned. . . .
Belinda knew for once Belinda shunned!
—Found in ungraciousness a charming grace,—
And wooed the smiles of an averted face!
Forced by the flying quarry to pursue,—
The tingling rapture of the chase I knew!
Then came the hour when, brought to bay at last,
He spoke—the glowing words poured thick and fast. . . .
The wealth—the wealth, it was that he abhorred,—
I found myself not hated—but adored!
He begged my hand, he sought to learn his fate!
I enjoined patience, who could scarcely wait!
(For it becomes a maid of wit and sense
To keep an eager wooer in suspense!)
To-day—ah! happy day! we both resort
With other swains and nymphs to Hampton Court,—
There, in some woodbine-bower, the birds shall see
Our plighted troth, and thrill in ecstasy!

[*A loud double knock below at the street door.*
BETTY runs in.]

BETTY.

My stars and garters, mum! A coach and six!
 Three lackeys up behind wi' gold-topped sticks!
 A little gentleman as gay as Poll—
 Asking for Madam!

BELINDA

[*Jumping up*].

Heavens! 'Tis Parvisol!

The great Parisian *perruquier* . . .
 He condescends to frizzle me to-day!
 Quick, child, throw wide the portals!

[*BETTY throws the double-doors wide open.*]

Place a plate!

[*BETTY sets a china plate upon the writing-table.*]
 Lay these ten guineas on the china. . . . Mate
 With them this snuff-box. . . .

[*Giving BETTY money and box.*]
 Of the choice rappee

He'll take a pinch, together with his fee!
 He comes. . . . I fly!

[*BELINDA runs quickly into the powder-closet.*]

THE VOICE OF SIR PLUME

[*Outside*].

But name your price;—consent!

THE VOICE OF PARVISOL

[*Outside*].

Sare, you are von goddam impertinent!

[*PARVISOL, a wizened little Frenchman, preposterously dressed, with an enormous full-bottomed chestnut wig, court sword, patches, and wearing slung over his left shoulder an embroidered baldric supporting a silver comb, curling-tongs, and a large pair of hairdresser's shears, etc., enters at a run, followed by SIR PLUME, who is a fop of the most pronounced type, gorgeously attired, and wearing a full-bottomed flaxen wig of flowing curls.*]

SIR PLUME.

“Impertinent!” To me you use that word?

[*Getting in his way.*]

PARVISOL

[*Defiantly*].

Sare, I would 'ave you know I wear a sword. . . .
 Whenever you shall please, I run you through!

SIR PLUME.

Why, strike me plain! 'Tis what I seek from you!

PARVISOL

[*Amazed*].

Vat! Zat I kill you?

SIR PLUME

[*Taking off his wig, and revealing a shaven head*].

Kill me! No! But curl!

One twiddle of your irons!

PARVISOL.

Non!

SIR PLUME

[*Imploringly extending his wig*].

One twirl!

They say your touch is perfect—

PARVISOL

[*Complacently*].

Oui? C'est vrai!

But for all zat, von 'ead I dress zis day

Vidin dis 'ouse, and dat one 'ead, pardie!

Is not von donkey's like vat now I see!

[*Going to the powder-closet.*]

SIR PLUME

[*Following him*].

But I insist! Oddsbods! I am not wont

To be refused! I' fackins! if you don't

Oblige, I shall be angry! faith indeed!

PARVISOL

[*Threateningly turning on him*].

Vat say you?

SIR PLUME

[*Sinking gracefully upon his knees*].

I command no more—I plead!

You can't resist!

PARVISOL

[Snatching SIR PLUME'S *wig*].

I mock myself of you!

English rosbif! Take zat!

[He claps the *wig* on hind part before.]

And . . . sans adieu!

[He disappears into the closet, slamming the door.]

SIR PLUME

[Turning round and round, blinded by *curls*].

Baffled! Defied, and by a menial worm!

[He falls upon the couch.]

BETTY.

O mun! I was afraid you'd do him harm!

You was so fierce, just like a raging lire!

SIR PLUME

[Settling his *wig* and fanning himself with his handkerchief].

A lion, child!

BETTY.

With eyes all flaming fire!

SIR PLUME

[Complacently].

I might have killed him in my choler. Tush!

[Admiring himself in a hand-mirror].

This now is scarce an unbecoming flush!

BETTY

[Sidling up].

'Tis like for all the world a damson rose!

SIR PLUME.

Damask, child, damask! Here, beside the nose,

A patch methinks might add new elegance—?

[He turns his full face to BETTY.]

BETTY

[Pretending to be overpowered with admiration].

O, mun, mun, mun!

SIR PLUME

[In consternation].

Alas! my killing glance!

Poor rustic virgin! stricken to the heart!

Say, art thou better, child? I trust thou art!

Sure as hope saved, I meant it not, no, no!

[Pulling out a guinea and looking the other way as he extends the coin.]

Take this!

BETTY

[Pocketing it].

A guinea!

SIR PLUME.

Medicine thy woe,

And, lest these eyes thy peace in future vex—

Avoid them. They are fatal to thy sex!

BETTY

[Giggling].

I 'on't look at 'e more, I fondly swear!

SIR PLUME

[Striking an attitude].

Nay! I would not condemn thee to despair!

Sometimes, when musing with averted gaze,

Your feeding eyes may dwell upon this face!

Tol-lol, la-la!

[Singing.]

BETTY

[In affected raptures].

O mun! I ne'er did hear

Father's great rooster crow more loud and clear!

SIR PLUME

[To himself].

Dumb, dumb, my voice! Mercy becomes the strong!

I am too irresistible in song!

THE VOICE OF BELINDA

[She lets down the sash-slide in the closet-door and peeps out].

Betty!

BETTY.

A-coming, Madam!

[To herself, as SIR PLUME admires his figure in toilet-table glass.]

Stare's 'ee wool!

'Tis but a zany gappin' at a vool!

[BETTY goes into the powder-closet as LADY TOP-INOTT, a handsome, well-preserved woman of fifty, elegantly dressed, enters with ALEXANDER POPE. POPE is a thin, short, sickly man of

thirty (see contemporary portraits), with a worn, intelligent face. One shoulder is higher than the other, and he limps painfully, walking with the aid of a crutched stick. He is plainly but well dressed in black, wears a tie-wig and a small sword, and has the air of a refined and highly educated gentleman.]

LADY TOPINOTT.

I vow I thought my son was in this room!

POPE

[Pointing to SIR PLUME, who is absorbed in contemplation of himself].

Madam, you thought aright. There is Sir Plume!

LADY TOPINOTT

[Fondly].

He does not see us!

[SIR PLUME takes out a set of tablets, a pencil, and begins to write, stopping every now and then to languish at his reflection in the glass.]

POPE.

Madam, no!

[SIR PLUME, in difficulties for a rhyme, mutters and gesticulates.]

LADY TOPINOTT.

He speaks!

Pray, Sir, observe and listen!

SIR PLUME

[Posturing in the toilet-glass].

'Mongst the Greeks

Paris was fairest, yet by Beauty's right
Plume, to all British swains superior quite
Art thou! Not Venus' self from lovelier Iad
Received the apple on the Troan—

POPE

[Grimacing].

Bad!

SIR PLUME

[Reciting].

"Why should maids of every station
Vain invoke the Pow'rs above!
And accuse the dispensation
Which compels 'em all to love?

While yon glass such charms discovers
As in bright reflection bloom—”

POPE

[*Capping the rhyme in imitation of SIR PLUME's manner*].

“Will a weeping world of lovers
Languish for thy smile, Sir Plume!”

SIR PLUME

[*His quizzing glass at his eye, fatuously scanning POPE*].
Lard! smoke the quiz! Who's he?

POPE

[*Drily*].

You have forgot
My face since yesterday, Sir, have you not?

LADY TOPINOTT

[*Shocked*].

Sure, son, 'tis Mr. Pope, the poet!

POPE

[*Ironically*].

Who

Is strange to Fame, unrecognized by you!

SIR PLUME

[*Taking snuff*].

Egad! I would not have you take it so!

[*Patronizingly to POPE*.]

I am accessible to poets, know

The Muse and I, have at odd hours—by way

Of pastime—

POPE.

Pastime! Ah Sir, what is play

To you is death to others!

SIR PLUME

[*Flattered*].

Say you so . . . ?

A pretty compliment. . . . Why, burn me, no!

I'm not so sure on't neither!

[*He stalks away indignantly as PARVISOL comes quickly out of the powder-closet*].

PARVISOL

[*With a profound bow to LADY TOPINOTT*].

Madame, give

But ze permission zat I take my leave . . . !

LADY TOPINOTT.

Surely, Sir!

SIR PLUME
[Turning].
The *friseur*!

LADY TOPINOTT
[Curtseying].

Bonjour, Mossoo!

[PARVISOL sweeps the guineas from the plate, takes a pinch of snuff with a superb air, and with another magnificent bow to LADY TOPINOTT, which she returns with a second curtsey, struts towards the door.]

SIR PLUME
[Interposing].

Hold! Pause! Reflect! Consider what you do!

[Circling round PARVISOL, who imperturbably continues to advance.]

Refuse to friz my wig? 'Odsbodkins!—Learn
That such an opportunity may ne'er return!
Ah! for the ladies' sake, relent!

[PARVISOL goes out.]
The devil!—

Sir, I protest you're monstrously uncivil!

[Runing out after him.]

Stop!

[The hall door is heard to shut and a carriage to drive away.]

LADY TOPINOTT
[Confidentially to POPE].

Your opinion of my son! . . . Be plain!
I fear 'tis some distemper of the brain!

[They sit together on the couch].

POPE
[With a twinkle in his eye].

Madam, he has none!

LADY TOPINOTT
[Relieved].

Thank the Pow'rs above!
But, Sir, his freaks—? His whims—?

POPE.

Are due to love!

LADY TOPINOTT
[*Incredulously*].

Love!

POPE
[*Decidedly*].

Love!

LADY TOPINOTT
[*Shaking her head*].

Wrong!

POPE.
[*Firmly*].

Right!

LADY TOPINOTT.

He's not in love!

POPE.

A Delft

Jug to a pipkin that he loves—himself!
 No malady more common, quickly caught,
 Or with more danger to the patient fraught
 Than this self-love!

LADY TOPINOTT

[*Flustered*].

What's to be done? Prescribe?

POPE

[*Taking snuff*].

Let him shun flatterers, and all the tribe
 Of parasites that hang upon a fool,
 And seem to serve, yet use him as their tool!
 Away with gewgaws and with folmajigs!
 Condemn him to plain ruffles and bob-wigs;
 Or better still! Compel him to despise
 Himself, the charms so precious in his eyes!
 Let him surprise himself—ahem! unclad—

[LADY TOPINOTT, *horrified, rises.*]

And draw from that bare text a sermon sad—
 Admit himself, of all his pride the source,
 A lean-ribbed scarecrow!

LADY TOPINOTT

[Scandalized, retreating to the door].

La! how shocking coarse!

POPE

[Following her].

A human radish—forked! A thing to excite
 Pity, not admiration! Not delight,—
 But shame!

LADY TOPINOTT

[Still retreating].

Alack!

POPE

[Still following].

If unconvinced he stays—

Confine him with himself a term of days
 Doomed to extend till he have learned to grow
 Sick of the creature he once worshipped so!
 Or if in vain the discipline enforced
 And from himself he will not be divorced— [Loudly.]
 Buy a rope!—drive a staple in the wall,
 And rid him of himself for good and all!

LADY TOPINOTT

[Hysterically].

Mercy! A smelling-flask! [She totters out.]

POPE.

A fiddlestick!

Pest on't! what waste of honest rhetoric!

[Taking a turn up and down.]

Better for me, I'll wager, if I had
 But saved my thunders for my Iliad!

BELINDA

[Re-entering from the powder-closet, followed by BETTY].
 So, Sir, you are obedient to-day![She now wears a charming negligée, and her hair
 is elaborately dressed though not powdered, two
 luxuriant curls being allowed to escape from the
 mass, and hang upon her neck behind.]

POPE

[Bowing, as BELINDA drops him a curtsey].

Who would Belinda's mandate disobey?
 "Attend on me," you said last night, "upon

The stroke of noon to-morrow," and 'tis done!
And I am here to do what else you choose!

BELINDA.

But, Sir, I think I bade you bring your Muse!
POPE.

Look in your toilet-glass, and you will see
I have not failed, she's now in company!

BELINDA

[*Sitting on the couch*].

Take yonder stool, pray now, and let us chat
While Betty makes me fair and fine!

[*BETTY goes to the toilet-table, opens the jewel-case and takes out diamond rings, bracelets, a necklace, and other ornaments.*]

POPE.

For that,—

Betty may make you fine, but I can swear,
Heaven and your mother, Madam, made you fair!

BELINDA

[*Putting on her rings*].

You strew my path with flowers of speech!

POPE.

You know,

Madam, 'tis sunshine makes the flowers grow;
With gentle breezes, and refreshing dews,
To which the unkindest soil can scarce refuse
The tribute of a primrose in the year . . .
Thus at your smile, your sigh, your blush, your tear,
The stony clay called Man, must needs relent,
And blossom forth into a compliment!

[*He sits on the tabouret.*]

BELINDA.

Poets are the politest men of all!

[*Surveying herself in the hand-mirror, her back to POPE.*]

Like you this head? 'Twas dressed by Parvisol!

POPE

[*Half playfully, half sadly*].

Malevolent! what pleasure could he find
In planning the destruction of his kind?

What imp of mischief prompted him to deck
 With those twinned ringlets that smooth ivory neck?
 Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,
 And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.
 Fair tresses Man's imperial race ensnare,
 And Beauty draws us with a single hair!

BELINDA.

That's vastly pretty and ingenious, Sir!
 Whence did you cull the fancy?

POPE.

Madam, where
 Such bright conceits invite the curious hand!
 I brought it back with me from Fairy-land!

BELINDA.

You have been there?

POPE.

When poets' eyes are sealed
 In waking dreams, to earthly scenes—revealed
 To the pure inner vision, then appear
 The elemental beings of the air.

[*Soft strains of distant harp music are heard. The daylight is darkened, as though a passing cloud obscured the sun, and the mysterious golden radiance once more suffuses the room.*]

Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight —
 Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light ;
 Some in the fields of purest ether play,

[*The forms of the SYLPHS become gradually visible.*]
 And bask and whiten in the blaze of day!
 Some guide the course of wand'ring orbs on high,
 Or roll the planets through the boundless sky ;
 Or brew fierce tempests on the wintry main,

[*A peal of distant thunder.*]
 Or o'er the glebe distill the kindly rain.

[*A sudden shower patters on the windows.*]
 Others on earth o'er human race preside,
 Watch all their ways and all their actions guide !
 And who above thyself should be esteem'd
 By such bright guardians?

BELINDA

[*Pensively, as the SYLPHS cluster lovingly around her.*].

Sure, 'tis odd—I dream'd

This morn—

POPE.

Attend! Unseen around you fly
 The light militia of the lower sky!
 Skilful, obsequious, ever on the wing,
 They haunt your box and hover round the Ring!
 Some save you powder from too rude a gale,
 Nor let the imprisoned essences exhale;

[*The SYLPHS busy themselves with BELINDA's toilet.*]
 Some arch the brows and curl the waving hairs,
 Assist your blushes and inspire your airs,
 Others repair your smiles, awake each grace,
 And call forth all the wonders of your face;
 Whilst others fold the sleeve, or plait the gown
 And—Betty's praised for labors not her own!

[*The SYLPHS vanish, their task completed.*]

BETTY

[*Curtsey*].

Madam, you're finished!

BELINDA

[*Looking in the mirror*].

Sure, another touch—

POPE

[*Rising*].

Would mar perfection!

[*BETTY goes out, carrying the macaw.*]

BELINDA

[*Rising*].

I protest I'm much

Obliged to your politeness.

POPE.

Pray you, name

The service which of my poor pen you claim,

Madam, before I leave you?

BELINDA

[*Confused*].

I'd have writ—

A letter!

POPE.

To—?

BELINDA.

A gentleman!

[*Turning her face away and fanning herself*].

POPE

[*Moving to the writing-table*].

To wit?

A letter civil, or a letter rude?

A letter gay, or sad, or bad, or good?

A soft letter, a letter hard as rock?

We can oblige,—we keep all kinds in stock,

Be it prolix, brief, sweet, bitter—cold or hot,—

Pray name your choice and have it on the spot!

BELINDA.

This letter, Sir, I'd have you understand,

Returns a passion, and accepts a hand!

POPE

[*To himself*].

Alas!

BELINDA

You said—?

POPE

[*With averted face*].

Name but the favored he?

[*BELINDA shakes her head*.]

The initial of the surname!

BELINDA

[*Turning her head away*].

'Tis—

POPE

[*Eagerly*].

'Tis—?

BELINDA

[*Faintly*].

“P!”

POPE

[*Timidly*].

P. stands for poet, Madam,—and for Pope!

BELINDA

[*Rapturously*].

And above all for Petre!

POPE

[*To himself*].

Die, my hope!

Poor weakling babe, thy life one instant's span!

So, my lord Baron is the happy man!

[*He goes to the writing-table.*]

What would you have me say?

BELINDA.

Say—but in rhyme—

Polish'd, befit—

POPE

[*Sarcastically*].

An object so sublime—

Heroic, grand—as my lord Tweedledee,

Shortest among the Greeks of epopee!

[*He unwillingly selects a pen and paper.*]

Well, Madam?

BELINDA.

Say—my soul dissolved in bliss

Swoons at the rapturous thought of being his!

Vow by that natural crown of curling hairs—

Which in defiance of all wigs, he wears—

That the blest hour when first I met his gaze

Kindled a torch to last out all my days!

[*Pope writes lines equivalent to the foregoing words, slowly and with great lack of interest, on a large square sheet of gilt-edged paper.*]

Say—

POPE

[*Wearily*].

Why, what more than this could e'er be said?

BELINDA.

Say that I love him, and consent to wed!

'Tis written?

POPE.

Madam, I am almost done!

BELINDA

[*Ringing the bell*].

Betty! [BETTY re-enters.]

Thy hood—thy mantle—put 'em on!

[*Impatiently to POPE, as BETTY hurries out*.]

Now, Sir—?

POPE

[*Sanding the letter*].

There, Madam!

BELINDA

[*Flying to look over his shoulder*].

Gemini! how pure!

Needs but that I append my signature

Here at the bottom!

POPE.

Hey?

BELINDA

[*Biting her lip*].

You understand—

I write such a great monstrous, sprawling hand

I am ashamed on't. Yours shall pass for mine

POPE

[*Vexed, taking snuff*].

Humph!

BELINDA.

Quick, the pen,—the pen! and let me sign!

[*Signing with flourish*.]

There! Now, the sheet I'll fold, the wax impress

[*Sealing*].With a pierced heart, and [to POPE]—Pray Sir, write the
address,

And all is o'er!

POPE.

And the poor scribe may go!

BELINDA.

I vow I blush to tax your kindness so;

[*Dictating the address*.]

“To my Lord Petre at his lodgings, near

St. James's Palace.” [Calling.] Betty! Betty!

[BETTY re-enters, in her hood and mantle.]

BETTY.

Here!

Be house afire?

BELINDA.

Hark, thou slug, thou snail,
 Thou creeping tortoise! Bear this without fail,
 Place in my lord's hands and at once return!

[BETTY runs out with the letter.]

O! how my pulses throb—my temples burn!—

[Fanning herself in a hurry, as the hall-door is heard to shut].

How beats my heart—the heart he stoop'd to win!

[A knock at the door.]

How—

POPE

[Drily].

Ma'am, there's knocking!

[Another knock.]

BELINDA

[Peevishly].

Plague on 'em! Come in!

[POMPEY enters with a magnificent basket of flowers, to the handle of which a letter is tied with a knot of love-ribbon.]

POMPEY

[Grinning diabolically].

Iss, Missis!

BELINDA

[Running to look].

These for me?

POMPEY.

Iss, missis!

[He skips out, with another diabolical grimace.]

BELINDA.

La!

How purely sweet these blushing roses are!

[Seeing the letter.]

A billet-doux! From him! Quick, quick, untie!

[Untying the knot.]

'Tis the new modish color, 'stifled sigh!'

[*Reading the superscription.*]
 "Mistress Belinda" here, in ink still wet,
 The seal—a Baron's five-pearled coronet. [Joyfully.]
 Impatient lover! couldst not thou then wait
 Till noon?

[*Kissing the letter, she breaks the seal, sits on the couch, and reads.*]
 What's here?

"Dear Jack.

A trick of Fate,
 The wanton jade that oft hath kissed and clipped
 Thy friend, now leaves him whipped, and dipped, and
 hipped!
 The few poor thousands hazard left to me
 Are sunk beyond reclaim, in the South Sea!
 And I, perforce, must hang upon my life
 That hampering clog to gallantry—a wife!
 On rich Belinda—"

[*Starting.*]

Ah! [Continuing to read.]

"I cast an eye,
 But found the courted maid farouche and shy,
 Fitting the quoted proverb to a pin—
 'Whom all the world woos is most hard to win!'"

Alas! [With a stifled sob.]

"'Twould weary to recount each art
 With which thy friend laid siege to Miss's heart;
 Tactics, manœuvres, mines, surprises! all
 That make a Marlborough a general
 Beyond compare—I used, and used too well!
 My flag waves o'er the conquer'd citadel!
 To-day at Hampton Court, what envious eyes
 Shall yellow as I vaunt my golden prize
 Before the Club—(her suitors to a Spark—
 Saving thyself, thou upright man of mark!)
 Till then farewell—I break off this despatch
 To pen a billet to my new-caught catch.
 (She loves me, the poor rogue!—would give me all!
 Ay! from her head her hair, an' I should call
 For such a sacrifice!6 When thou shalt meet her
 Commend me well, good Jack!"

Thy faithful, PETRE!"

[*To herself, bitterly.*]

O! rash! to seal ere the address he penned
And thus betray his own unworthy end!
Base wretch!

[*With tragic intensity, crumpling the letter into a ball.*]

POPE

[*Overhearing*].
Oddso!

BELINDA

[*Rising to her feet, and hurling the letter in the fireplace.*]

Villain!

POPE.

Why, what's to do?

Love's weathercock has turned, the wind is due
North.

BELINDA

[*With a shriek, flying to ring the bell.*]
Horror! Betty! [*She rushes to the door.*] Betty!

POPE

[*Stopping his ears*].
'Zooks!

BELINDA

[*Screaming*].

Come back!

Gone! Out of sight and sound! I'm lost, alack!
Ruined, undone! Betrayed!

[*LADY TOPINOTT sweeps in, followed by SIR PLUME.*]

LADY TOPINOTT.

Alas, my niece!

Why, why these words distraught?

BELINDA

[*Throwing herself upon the couch.*]

Leave me in peace!

[*She buries her head in the sofa cushions.*]

SIR PLUME

[*To himself*].

'Tis Cupid troubles here. Why was I born
To render maidens wretched and forlorn?

BELINDA
[*Sobbing*].

I shall expire of spleen!

POPE.

With fashionable folk!

BELINDA

[*Distractedly quoting from the letter*].

“She loves, poor rogue!

Would give me all,—ay! from her head her hair.”

[*Furiously, spinging to her feet.*]

When from the scalp thy ruffian hand shall tear
It, then a lock is thine!

SIR PLUME.

Pray, what's the pother?

LADY TOPINOTT.

Who is't has wronged you?

BELINDA

[*Tragically*].

Petre—and no other!

O, jewelled idol, raised on feet of clay,
How art thou shattered?

POPE

[*To himself*].

Wiping tears away!

More than her vanity is hurt by this.
Her heart bleeds!

BELINDA.

I have done with him and his!

Henceforth all manly graces I'll despise,
Pitre hath made them hateful in mine eyes!
I'll be a nun!

SIR PLUME

[*Horrorified*].

Nay, nay!

BELINDA.

I will!

POPE

[*Slyly*].

Despite

That letter you despatched—

BELINDA
[*Imperiously*].

Take pen, and write

Another, to revoke the fond decree
That named *him* master of my heart and me;
Recall the troth—unpledge the vows—

POPE

[*Moving briskly to the writing-table*].

In fine

The honor of alliance you'd decline
On second thoughts?

BELINDA

[*Nerving herself*].

Plumply and plainly!

POPE

[*Arranging pens and paper with relish*] Ho!

[*He writes.*]

BELINDA.

There are a thousand ways of saying "No!"
Pick out the bitterest. Let gall be shed
Instead of ink, on the devoted head
Of the smooth traitor, bland, demure, elate! . . .
O! if you love me, lend me all your hate
To eke out mine! Meed of your anger grant;
Your wit, to point the jeer and edge the taunt;
Spare not your thunders, I implore of you,
And be no niggard of your lightnings!

POPE

[*Writing in red-hot haste and with great enjoyment*].
Pooh!

The theme inspires—my Muse no longer trots
But gallops. Finished!

BELINDA

[*Snatching the sand-castor and shaking it over table, paper, and Pope*].

Never heed the blots!

The letter of rejection! Read I must!

[*Ousting POPE from his chair and rapidly scanning the letter.*]

Ay, this had brought presumption to the dust
 Forever, had I writ and sent it first!
 But now! . . . O! hapless maid! [Sobbing.] O!
 day accurst!
 Can this be me, immers'd in tears and woe,
 That was so happy one short hour ago?
 Alas! [Weeping, her head bowed upon the writing-table.]

POPE

[Leaning over her].

Look up: you have not yet lost all!

BELINDA

[Her face hidden, speaking through sobs].
 What! when that letter's gone beyond recall!

POPE

[Whispering].

It may yet be recovered!

BELINDA

[Looking up].

How?

POPE.

[After a moment's reflection, the second letter in his hand].

I have thought . . .

To-day you meet my lord at Hampton Court . . .
 Engage the enemy with smiling face,
 Manage to see your letter—and its place
 Supply with this,—so different in tone,—
 Achieve the exchange, and call the day your own!

BELINDA

[With the tone and manner of high tragedy, rising].

It shall be done! I'll tax my woman's guile
 To summon to these lips a serpent's smile;
 I'll coax and coo and play a turtle's part,
 Though a Hyrcanian tigress at the heart—
 The basilisk or cockatrice shall be
 Abashed before my craft and subtlety—
 Ay, if I turn cutpurse or pickpocket,
 Deuce take me! but I'll have that letter yet!

SIR PLUME

[*Perplexed*].Nay, prithee! Why, 'fore Gad, she seems so strange—
LADY TOPINOTT.

Fie! niece, you should control your passion's range!

BELINDA

[*Loftily*].

Behold! my aunt, my cousin and my friend,

A virgin dedicated to the end

Of vengeance! Tremble, falsest of all men—

[*Dipping the pen in the ink-bottle.*]

As in this inky tide I steep my pen,

[*Signing her name to letter No. 2.*]

And register in Acheron the vow—

[*A distant roll of thunder.*]

THE VOICES OF THE SYLPHS

[*Warningly in the distance*].

Rash maiden, pause!

BELINDA.

Furies, assist me now!

Ye Gorgons grim, and hovering harpies, hear!

Imps, gnomes and goblins, let your aid be near!

POMPEY.

Iss, Missis!

THE SYLPHS

[*Faintly in the distance*].

Hold!

DEMON VOICES UNDERGROUND.

Ha, ha!

THE SYLPHS.

Forbear!

THE SUBTERRANEAN VOICES

[*Triumphantly*].

Too late!

THE SYLPHS

[*Their voices dying away despairingly in the distance*].

Alas!

BELINDA

[*Brandishing the letter of rejection*].

With this, I'll meet and conquer Fate!

THE ACT DROP FALLS UPON A PICTURE.

It rises once more, discovering BELINDA in hysterics upon the couch. POPE, burning a quill pen in a lighted taper, holds the frizzing feather under the sufferer's nose. LADY TOPINOTT applies smelling-salts, while SIR PLUME solicitously fans her.

ACT II

HAMPTON COURT. *A bowling-green with two pavilions, in the classic style. The pavilions are wreathed with roses, an ornamental escutcheon bears the name of "The Sparks' Club." A flight of stone steps flanked by moss-grown marble urns in which clipped box-trees are growing, leads to the river, where barges, skiffs, and sailing-vessels ply to and fro. Upon the farther side of the river lie the green woods and flowery meadows of East Molesey, bathed in the sunshine of a bright day in June. Garden alleys lead to a shrubbery, beyond which one catches a glimpse of the Palace; a leaden figure of a negro supports a sun-dial, and near this is a stone seat.*

The hour is three o'clock noon.

Grouped in gossiping knots upon the greensward, or lounging on rustic seats, the members of the Sparks' Club, a bevy of beaux and men of fashion, in curled and frizzed periwigs and costly and splendid attire. Others arrive in wherries, rowed by badged and blue-coated watermen, ascend the landing-stairs and mingle with the throng. Liveried SERVANTS hurry to and fro; all is bustle and liveliness.

Seated at dice in the lower pavilion, with other players, THE MARQUESS OF FOPTOWN, a sinister-looking, sallow personage, SIR CHARLES DAPPERWIT, a slim, affected dandy, and COLONEL POYNTZ, a handsome, soldierly man of middle age, who wears the scarlet of the Queen's Life Guards, and when excited, speaks with an Irish accent.]

FOPTOWN

[*About to throw*].

I call a cast!

DAPPERWIT.
What chance?

FOPTOWN
[*Pondring*].

Hum! Seven's the main!
[*He throws.*]

Nicked! Stap my vitals—no!

POYNTZ
[*As Bunker*].

You're crabbed again,
[*Sweeping up the stakes*].

DAPPERWIT.

And for the third time!

FOPTOWN
[*Annoyed*].

What the deuce!

'Tis Petre's awkward luck!

DAPPERWIT
[*Affectedly*].

Yet who can lose
More gracefully than Petre!

FOPTOWN
[*Drily*].

Practice makes

Perfect, they say!

[*Some GENTLEMEN arrive in chairs. They alight
and mingle with the others.*]

POYNTZ.

I grant, the Baron shakes
The bones but seldom to a winning throw!
But who at play's unlucky—

FOPTOWN
[*Bored*].

Ay! we know
How the saw runs! 'Tis true the sex adore
The rake!

[*SIR PLUME is carried on in a sedan chair, by four
liveried SERVANTS.*]

DAPPERWIT.

But he's a thrice-sworn bachelor!
As well thou know'st, who art his crony, Jack!

POYNTZ.

Triple, like single oaths, are made to break!
The Baron woos a lady young and rich!

[*The CHAIMEN set down the sedan and raise the top. SIR PLUME appears, elaborately costumed, curled, and powdered.*]

DAPPERWIT.

Gadso!

FOPTOWN.

The cunning rogue!

SIR PLUME

[*To a SERVANT*].

Hold, lout! You twitch
My Mechlin! Pshaw! [Getting out.]

DAPPERWIT.

In all good faith?

[*To POYNTZ.*]

FOPTOWN.

No jest!

SIR PLUME

[*To another SERVANT*].

I am not to be touched when I am dressed!

DAPPERWIT.

[*Buttonholing POYNTZ.*].

Her name, Jack!

POYNTZ

[*Tantalizingly*].

You have toasted it a score

Of times!

[*SIR PLUME mincingly greets several gentlemen.*]

FOPTOWN.

'Tis not Belinda?

DAPPERWIT.

—The Fermor?

FOPTOWN

[*At a nod from POYNTZ.*].

Thunder and lightning!

DAPPERWIT.

Rapiers run me through!

FOPTOWN

[*Anxiously*].

Will he obtain her?

DAPPERWIT.

'Twere indeed a *coup*

Did he succeed!

[SIR PLUME approaches as COLONEL POYNTZ draws out a letter.]

He writes thee, Jack?

POYNTZ.

You see

His hand: the missive is inscribed for me!

"To Colonel Poyntz, at Knightsbridge."

DAPPERWIT.

On, Jack, on!

SIR PLUME

[Mincingly greeting FOPTOWN].

My Lord! . . . What, Dapperwit!

[To POYNTZ, tapping the letter with his cane.]

Fresh battles won

Upon the field of Love? Hey, Colonel, hey?

POYNTZ.

Judge for yourself.

[Reading.]

"Writ at the break of day

Upon the pillow blest by dreams of thee."

FOPTOWN

[Puzzled].

What?

DAPPERWIT

[Staring and taking snuff].

Cursed odd!

SIR PLUME

[Tittering].

Some mantua-maker! Hee!

POYNTZ

[Continuing to read].

"Bright goddess, thou, whom I must hold divine,
Despite the dross that glitters on thy shrine." . . .

DAPPERWIT.

Pooh!

SIR PLUME.

Pshaw!

FOPTOWN.

His wits were wandering with some jade
When this was scrawled!

POYNTZ

[*Reading*].

*"Wert thou a beggar-maid,
How blest were I the monarch's part to play,
And crown thee Queen of a Cophetua!
Ah, my Belinda!" . . .*

SIR PLUME

[*Staring*].

Hey? Hey? What?

FOPTOWN

[*Nudging DAPPERWIT*].

I smoke

The blunder!

DAPPERWIT.

Gadso! 'Tis a monstrous joke!

SIR PLUME.

Yet it were best this amorous swain should know
Belinda's heart is not hers to bestow!

FOPTOWN

[*Contemptuously*].

She sighs for thee?

DAPPERWIT.

They all do!

SIR PLUME

[*Self-consciously*].

Hapless maid!

Thy bosom's secret shall not be betrayed!

Go, go! tush!

[*He struts away.*]

FOPTOWN.

Read on, Jack, for I would hear!

[*Contemptuously*.]

This shepherd's pipe is pleasing to the ear.

POYNTZ

[*Proceeding*].

*"How happy I, did kindly Fate remove
The heaped-up wealth that blocks the path of Love;
Bliss unalloyed and perfect should I taste,
Nor envy Croesus' self, of thee possessed!"*

*This noon we meet. In pity then, impart
The balm of Hope to a distracted heart!
Should chance no heavenly tête-à-tête allow,
Breathe but a yes! Some trying gaze bestow
(A ribbon-knot, a flower, or a mitt,
The warmth and perfume of your hand in it!)
Or pluck from Stygian depths of chill despair
Thy drowning Petre—with a lock of hair!"*

[*Folding up the letter.*]

Here 't ends!

DAPPERWIT
[*Delighted*].

In error then to thee was sent
The billet Petre for Belinda meant?

FOPTOWN.

How will she relish that he penned for Jack?
Should it have reached her by the same mistake?
Gad! but 'twere comedy to see her read!

DAPPERWIT.

I smoke a rich imbroglio!

POYNTZ
[*Regretfully*].

Ay, indeed!

[*A general movement amongst the Crowd.*]

FOPTOWN.

He comes!

POYNTZ.

Gentlemen Sparks, our President!

[*A demonstration of welcome from the assemblage as LORD PETRE, a handsome young man, attired in the height of the fashion, and displaying the diamond badge of the Club Presidency, arrives. He wears his own hair, which is luxuriant and curling, and his manner is easy, well-bred, and assured.*]

THE SPARKS.
[*Lifting their hats.*]

Welcome!

[*LORD PETRE, smiling, bows gracefully right and left.*]

DAPPERWIT

[To FOPTOWN].

I spy no signs of discontent!

PETRE.

Good brother Sparks, good day!

FOPTOWN

[Whispering to DAPPERWIT].

Mark him and—mum!

[COL. POYNTZ advances to LORD PETRE. They exchange a hearty greeting].

POYNTZ

[As PETRE claps him on the shoulder].

Not downcast! Faith! I looked to see thee glum
As thou art gay!

PETRE.

What! should I mope and gloom

On such a day of color and perfume!

When larks are singing in the aerial blue,

I tell thee, gossip Jack, my heart sings too!

Canst thou not guess the tune? *She's mine!*

POYNTZ

[Doubtfully].

Old boy,

If thou art sure of it, I wish thee joy!

PETRE.

If I am sure on't! says old Soberface!

Why, hadst thou not my letter, bully?

[SIR PLUME, DAPPERWIT, and FOPTOWN converse].

POYNTZ

[Coughing].

Yes!

I had a letter, truly; but—

PETRE.

Egad!

Wert thou a suitor to her, Jack, old lad?

POYNTZ.

Pho!—nonsense!

PETRE

[Indicating the SPARKS].

An' it would afford relief

To count all these companions in thy grief,

Prithee, Jack, tarry till I light the fuse
 And blow the whole Club sky-high with my news!
 Meanwhile bright Phœbus shines upon our féte!

POYNTZ

[*Looking down the river*].

And lo! The bark of Venus!

FOPTOWN

[*Putting up a quizzing glass*].

With its freight

Of Loves and Graces!

DAPPERWIT.

As by magic seems
 To glide towards us o'er the silver Thames!

FEMALE VOICES

[*From the river*].

GLEE.

Swift and secure our painted vessel glides,
 The sunbeams trembling on the floating tides;
 While melting music steals upon the sky
 And softened sounds upon the waters die.
 Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gently play,
 When Beauty smiles, the world must needs be gay!

THE SPARKS *crowd to the landing-stairs as a gilded and decorated state barge, tastefully wreathed with garlands of roses, is pulled up stream. The rowers are watermen in the Club livery. In the prow a band of violins playing. In the stern, under a purple silk awning, BELINDA reclines upon cushions. LUCINDA, SACHARISSA, and CLARISSA being grouped round her with other LADIES. POMPEY squats at BELINDA's feet. The barge is rowed to the landing-stairs. BELINDA rises, smiling, alights, and ascends the stairs, her train carried by POMPEY. She accepts, not without some signs of secret reluctance, LORD PETRE's hand. SACHARISSA follows, led by SIR PLUME. CLARISSA, a superb brunette, and LUCINDA, a charming blonde, are respectively received by COLONEL POYNTZ and LORD FOPTOWN. Each lady, as she gains the summit of the steps, is received in the same manner by*

a gentleman, until all are arrayed in double line ready to commence the minuet. At this point the VIOLINISTS leave the barge and group in the upper pavilion. The barge is rowed off. A flourish of violins. A preliminary bow and curtsey of partners.]

A MINUET DE LA COUR.

[*At the close of the dance the various couples stroll away into the garden-alleys and shrubbery, the MUSICIANS and SERVANTS withdraw, and LORD PETRE and BELINDA are left alone together. LORD PETRE, as in the last figure of the minuet, kneeling at BELINDA's feet. He attempts to kiss her hand; she withdraws it sharply.*]

PETRE

[*Reproachfully*].

Ah! cruel charmer! Must I then release
This hand, so newly plighted?

BELINDA

[*Coldly*].

If you please!

Folks may observe us!

PETRE

[*Grandiloquently*].

Let all Nature see
And chant in chorus, "Hymen! Hymenee!"
Let all the Planets, with the Moon and Sun,
Earth, Air, Fire, Water—witness thou art won!
Whilst shades of classic lovers hover near
To attest those priceless vows I carry—here!

[*Striking his breast.*]

BELINDA

[*Her hand to her heart*].

O, me!

PETRE

[*Supporting her*].

Alas! what ails? Thou scarce canst stand!

BELINDA

[*Feigning faintness*].

A little water! Bring it in your hand!
There's plenty in the river!

[*Viciously, as LORD PETRE assists her to the stone seat near the sun-dial, and descends the water steps.*]

For a pin,

I would! . . . How I would love to push him in!
But legal Justice waits on deeds of force,
And they might find my letter on the corse!

[*Shuddering.*]

That letter sent in error,—fatal—dire!
Which paints a passion in such words of fire,
The mere remembrance humbles me to dust!

[*Passionately.*]

I must recover it—I must—I must!

[*She draws letter No. 2 from her bosom.*]

Here's the rejection. Scornful, absolute,
Defiant . . . freezing! Now to substitute
This folded paper for the other sheet
And bring yon coxcomb grovelling to my feet!

[*As LORD PETRE returns, carrying water in his hat.*]
O Lud! my lord! [Affectedly, pointing to the hat.]

'Tis ruined,—dripping—green!

PETRE

[*Gallantly.*].

Raleigh once spoiled a cloak to serve a Queen.
I to my sovereign dedicate a hat!

[*Bows elaborately, flourishes the hat, and spills the water.*]

Gadzooks! there goes the water!

BELINDA.

Heed not that!

I am recovered! Sit beside me, pray!

PETRE.

With bliss I hear—with rapture I obey!

BELINDA

[*To herself.*].

O! why in thee was treachery made fair?
Gracelessness gracious?

PETRE

[*Sitting beside her.*].

Madam, do I err

Or did you speak?

BELINDA
 [Maliciously].

I mumbled, did not I?
 You know I am at times "*farouche and shy.*"
 PETRE.

Nay! I protest!

BELINDA
 [Quoting from his letter].

Pray, Marshal, with the story of the siege!

PETRE
 [Bewildered].

Siege, Madam?

BELINDA.

Tell me all. Recount each art
 With which you stormed that citadel, my heart!
 Tactics, manœuvres, mines—let's have 'em, speak!

PETRE
 [Embarrassed].

Pshaw!

BELINDA
 [Ironically].

How a blush becomes a conqueror's cheek!
 [As LORD PETRE manifests profound uneasiness.]
 But what disturbs my lord? He frowns—would rise!
 Is he not happy with his "*golden prize*"?

[Coquettishly.]

Fie! dost thou find it tedious to colloquie
 Thus long with one who loves thee,—the "*poor rogue*"?

PETRE

[To himself, bewildered].

All that she says I seem to have heard before!
 But where?—My brain grows dizzy!

BELINDA.

You, let me see that letter!

I implore

PETRE
 [Vaguely].

Letter?

BELINDA
[Archly].

Sly!

'Tis hidden there, you know as well as I!

[Tapping LORD PETRE'S waistcoat with her fan.]

PETRE

[With laborious gallantry].

To rob me of my treasure art thou fain?

[He draws the letter of acceptance from his bosom.]

BELINDA.

One peep, and you shall have it back again!

Truth is, I spell but ill, and I would prove

How many blunders I have made in "love."

PETRE

[Bowing and handing her the letter].

None, I hope, Madam!

BELINDA.

O! a great one. See,

"U" popped in here, where "u" ought not to be!

Fie! now you smile. Ay, turn your head away!

You know you did! [Rapidly changing the letters.]

Accomplished! Victory!

[Springing to her feet.]

PETRE

Eh?

What said my fair one? [Rising in surprise.]

BELINDA

[Extending letter No. 2].

Take your letter, Sir!

[Curtseying.]

And much good may it do your lordship!

[Contemptuously tossing him the letter.]

There!

[She runs off laughing.]

PETRE.

Her look—how wild! Her laugh—what frantic glee . . .
Can she be tainted with insanity?

Horrible thought! Shall my descendants wear
Chains round their waists, and bedstraws in their hair?

[SIR PLUME appears in the distance.]

Her cousin! Faith! I'll sound him!

SIR PLUME
[Jauntily approaching].

What? Alone?
Of all the fair is there no fairest one?

PETRE.

Upon your arm, Sir, hangs no charming friend!

SIR PLUME.

He for whose favors all the sex contend
Must needs live lonely!

PETRE.

Pray, Sir Plume, afford
One moment's conversation here!

SIR PLUME

[Bowing].

My lord!

Delighted!

PETRE

[Embarrassed].

I would ask you in your ear—

Hem!

SIR PLUME.

Hey?

PETRE

[Hesitating].

The question's delicate, I fear!

Ticklish and nice!

SIR PLUME.

Why, out with it, egad!

PETRE

[Bluntly].

Is not your cousin just a little—mad?

SIR PLUME.

Mistress Fermor! Belinda?

PETRE.

Even she!

SIR PLUME.

Mad, said you?

PETRE.

I said—mad!

SIR PLUME

[*Smirking*].

She is!

[LORD PETRE starts back with an ejaculation of
horror.]

For me!

Distracted—clean!

PETRE

[*Coldly*].

Indeed!

SIR PLUME.

I am humane,

Yet, 'tis my lot to cause continual pain . . .

I think of turning hermit, faith!

PETRE

[*Ironically*].

Let me

Advise. . . . Retire to some menagerie.

A cage's iron bars have oft defied

Caresses levelled at the ape inside!

[*He turns upon his heel and goes away.*]

SIR PLUME

[*Singing and Dancing*].

With pipe and with crook

I'll resort to some nook,

Buried deep in a pastoral vale;

With my lambs and their dams,

My calves, and my rams—

Love shall never this shepherd assail!

Fal la!

Love shall never this shepherd assail!

[SACHARISSA, who is a buxom little person of about
forty, over-dressed and heavily rouged, returns
from the gardens.]

SACHARISSA

[*Overhearing*].If thou a shepherd's calling dost profess,
Let Sacharissa be thy shepherdess!

SIR PLUME

[To himself].

Another of my victims. I'll appear
Unconscious![He takes snuff, admiring himself in a mirror within
the snuff-box lid.]

SACHARISSA

[Jealously].

Faithless one! what have you there?

Some face portrayed within your snuff-box lid?
Cruel! And whose? Nay, do not keep it hid!

SIR PLUME

[Hanging the box].

Judge for yourself the picture here concealed.

SACHARISSA

[To herself, with a start of joy].

No portrait, but a mirror lies revealed!
I see my own face!

SIR PLUME

[Peering over her shoulder].

Sure, you will admit

A masterpiece of Nature! [Smirking.] Exquisite!
Superb!

SACHARISSA

[Overjoyed].

He loves me! [To SIR PLUME, timidly.]

Sir, if I assent

You'll deem me vain!

SIR PLUME.

Pho! pho! The face I meant
Was mine, Madam, not yours!

SACHARISSA

[In tears of rage].

Derided! scorned!

SIR PLUME.

Madam, this frenzy—

SACHARISSA

[Explosively].

Oh!

SIR PLUME.

Pay now, be warned,

You'll discompose me, Madam, much I fear . . .
Upon my life I feel a fluttering here! . . .

[Pressing his hand to his side.]

My heart!

[Lackadaisically.]

SACHARISSA

[Violently].

You have none!

SIR PLUME

[Writhing].

Torture!

SACHARISSA

[Viciously].

Serve you right!

SIR PLUME.

Her Grace of Queensberry receives to-night.
Think what a desert were each glittering room,
Void of the features and the form of Plume!

SACHARISSA

[Conscience-stricken, sinking to her knees].

True, true! O! pardon me—the look, the tone
That caus'd thee anguish!

SIR PLUME

[Raising her].

Do not weep and moan!

Lend me thy hand! Together we will pace
Yon garden walks and thread the devious maze . . .
Be it thine with soft attentions to renew
In this pale cheek of mine the rosy hue,
With sprightly chat recall the banish smile
And deem me all thine own a little while![They go away together, lovingly, as LORD PETRE
returns, arm in arm with COLONEL POYNTZ and
LORD FOPTOWN, and accompanied by DAPPER-
WIT and the other SPARKS.]

DAPPERWIT.

[Congratulating PETRE].

A triumph!

Not Versailles might charm the eyes

More charmingly.

A SPARK.

Egad! scarce Paradise!

For there the angels flaunt no small black sins
To enhance the lily whiteness of their skins!

POYNTZ.

I deal not in fine phrases, as thou know'st,
But 'tis a feather in thy cap to boast

Of, lad! [Clapping LORD PETRE on the shoulder.]

PETRE

[The centre of a group].

Lest I should share Tarpeia's fate,
Spare me! I sink o'erwhelmed beneath the weight
Of all these compliments. Besides, ere tea
And Beauty crown the revels of the day,
Permit that I, your President till now,
Tender the Club my parting speech and bow!

[General sensation.]

POYNTZ.

Hey?

A SPARK.

Damme!

DAPPERWIT.

What?

A SPARK.

A bite!

FOPTOWN.

He speaks in jest!
[General clamor.]

PETRE

[Enforcing silence by a gesture].

In earnest, with my hand upon my breast!
Tears in each eye and tremors in my voice,
I, first elected by the general choice
Your President, resign the chair of state,
Lay all my honors down and abdicate!

[Taking off the President's badge and handing it to
COL. POYNTZ amidst profound silence.]

The deed is done. What's left me now to do
But ring sad changes on the word "adieu."
Adieu to debts! To duns my fond adieux!
Adieu to knaves, to sharpers, and to Jews.

Adieu to rattling days and roaring nights!
Adieu the Grecian coffee-house and White's!

[Gradually increasing excitement and curiosity amongst the listeners.]

Adieu to yawning breakfasts at midday!
To morning suppers and to midnight play!
Adieu to hazard, and the fair expanse
Of the green tables where the light dice dance!
Adieu to faro—best beloved by far—
No more I'll punt for *soixante et le va!*
Adieu to heady Burgundy, also
Adieu to Port—my tipple's sour Bordeaux!

[A general shudder.]

Adieu to tavern brawls and Mohock raids!
Adieu to twisted knockers and cracked heads!
To broken lamps, the watchman's gory nose!

[The sensation increases.]

The whoop that breaks the snoring cit's repose!
Adieu to duels fought with husbands crowned
With those branched ornaments which so abound!
Adieu to racing—coursing—cock-fighting!
Adieu to every one and every thing—
Dear to a Spark of spirit, until—

[Tantalizingly, enjoying the general surprise.]

THE SPARKS.

When?

PETRE.

[Languidly, taking snuff].

Until I'm snugly married, gentlemen!

ALL THE SPARKS

[Shouting].

Married?

FOPTOWN.

To whom? Name!

ALL.

Name!

PETRE

[Coolly flicking snuff from his ruffles].

Mistress Fermor!

[Tremendous sensation.]

ALL THE SPARKS.

Belinda!

A SPARK.

The bright goddess all adore!

ANOTHER.

And all pursue!

ANOTHER.

The cynosure of eyes!

ANOTHER.

Goal of all wishes!

ANOTHER.

The Pactolean prize!

ANOTHER

[Swearing].

The devil!

ANOTHER.

Stap my vitals!

ANOTHER.

Blood an' 'ouns!

ANOTHER.

Brimstone and pitchforks!

[A tumult of oaths and execrations.]

PETRE

[Looking coolly round].

Why these gloomy frowns?

These thunderous curses that salute my ears?

These fiery glances and these envious sneers?

Damn it! congratulate me, some of you!

POYNTZ

[Shaking LORD PETRE'S hand].

Heartily, lad!

FOPTOWN.

My lord, if this be true!—

[With a deprecatory gesture as LORD PETRE angrily
claps his hand to his sword.]All here, being suitors to the fair you name,
Entreat you will substantiate your claim
Ere we draw bridle,—quit the field apace,
And leave to you the honors of the chase!

PETRE.

Belinda takes me—can't ye understand?

[*Looking round the circle of SPARKS.*]
 Come! Will assurance under her own hand
 Convince ye?

[*With repressed triumph, about to draw BELINDA's letter from his bosom.*]

ALL THE SPARKS

[*Unanimously*].

Ay!

FOPTOWN

[*Whispering to DAPPERWIT.*]

Some cursed chance has foiled
 The bite we looked for!

DAPPERWIT.

And the game is spoiled!

PETRE

[*Drawing out BELINDA's second letter and unfolding it.*]

See—hear—believe, each dubious doubting Tom!

Mine the reward of courage—skill—*aplomb*!

A heart is tangled in this running line,

Belinda and her money-bags are mine!

[*Dead silence of attention on the part of the SPARKS.*]
 Ahem! [Reads.] “*Hopinott House, in Berkeley Square,*”
 Dated this day. . . . “My Lord,” Odsbods! what's here?

[*Puzzled.*]

FOPTOWN

[*To DAPPERWIT.*]

“My Lord!” What think you?

DAPPERWIT.

Why, a trifle stiff!

PETRE

“*You have been pleased to throw the handkerchief—*”

[*Thunderstruck, staring at the letter.*]

Death and the devil!

DAPPERWIT

[*To FOPTOWN.*]

How he frowns and gnaws

His lips!

FOPTOWN

[*Nudging him.*]

Some sport is hatching!

PETRE.

Traitor !

FOPTOWN

[Jeeringly].

Pause

No longer, but continue, Baron, pray !

[*Tipping the wink to the SPARKS*].

THE SPARKS.

The letter ! Read !

PETRE

[Greatly embarrassed].

I am not well to-day !

I have the gout !

DAPPERWIT.

Your lordship's toe is wrung

With torturing twinges—not your lordship's tongue !
So, without more ado, proceed !

PETRE.

You ask

A thing impossible !

FOPTOWN

[Suddenly snatching the letter].

Be mine the task !

PETRE

[Throwing himself furiously upon LORD FOPTOWN].
Give back the letter, Sir !

FOPTOWN

[Tossing the letter to DAPPERWIT].

Master the page !

Declaim the contents, whilst I stem his rage !

[Forcibly restraining LORD PETRE].

PETRE

[Struggling].

'Ounds, blood and furies !

[General hubbub].

FOPTOWN.

Help.

[The SPARKS rush to LORD FOPTOWN'S assistance.

LORD PETRE is overpowered.]

THE SPARKS.

We hold him safe !

FOPTOWN

[*Trying LORD PETRE's lace handkerchief over his mouth.*].

Now canst thou do no more than gnash and chafe!
Hie on, good Charles,—hie on!

DAPPERWIT

[*Reading amidst breathless attention.*].

“My Lord, you have
Been pleased to throw the handkerchief! . . . Your slave
(Did you possess one) might in rapture bound,
To lift the precious token from the ground—”

[*A SPARK snatches the letter from DAPPERWIT.*]

THE SPARK

[*Reading.*].

“But I am no Circassian, swathed in veils—”

ANOTHER SPARK

[*Snatching the letter and reading.*].

“Nor are you, Sir, a Bashaw with three tails!”

[*A roar of laughter.*]

POYNTZ

[*Infected by the general spirit.*].

Give't here! [Possessing himself of the letter.]

[*Reading.*] “In future, Sir, I would advise:

Woo with more art, and less of enterprise!

Hoist not your pirate-colors quite so plain

When you give chase upon the perilous main

To some deep vessel, rich with China wares,

Or galleon laden with Potosi shares!”

[*Another explosion of laughter; POYNTZ meets LORD PETRE's reproachful glance and tosses the letter across to a YOUNG SPARK upon his left hand.*]

Take it!

DAPPERWIT

[*To the YOUNG SPARK.*].

Give tongue, Hal!

THE YOUNG SPARK

[*With a country accent.*].

I cannot read!

Why, to own th' truth

[*More Laughter.*]

FOPTOWN

[*Taking the letter from the YOUNG SPARK*].

Resign, unlettered youth,

To one more learned the precious palimpsest!

Now, gentlemen, attention for the rest! [Reading.]

"*A truce to mockery, and jesting, Sir!*

Let me bring all my earnestness to bear

To express the stern, unchangeable decree

Signed, sealed, delivered by my heart to me!

I love you not! [LORD PETRE starts violently.]

My eye, my ear, my sense,

My judgment, vindicate my indifference,

Colossal, icy, vast, remote, profound

As those conjectured solitudes that bound

The Poles. Then! hear me, you who fondly dreamt

No female eye could view you with contempt!

Did this revolving planet bear through Space

No living scions of the human race

Save thou and I,—as in the primal plan

Earth's only woman and Earth's only man;

Comprehend,—credit, understand—believe,

Ne'er in Belinda should you find an Eve!

Did all created things before you bow,

I should reject as I reject you now!"

[*A dead silence. The SPARKS have released LORD PETRE, he has torn the handkerchief from his mouth and thrown it angrily upon the ground, at which he is gloomily staring.*]

FOPTOWN

[*With a long, shrill whistle*].

Whew!

DAPPERWIT

[*Whistling*].

Whew!

POYNTZ

[*Whistling*].

Whew!

ALL THE SPARKS

[*Crescendo*].

Whew!

PETRE

[To FOPTOWN, sternly].

My letter, Sir, resign!

FOPTOWN

[Drawing his sword, spitting the letter on the point, and handing it with cool insolence to LORD PETRE].

Baron, most willingly!

PETRE

[Drawing his own sword, making a dexterous pass, transfixing the letter and recovering it].

To-night, at nine,

[Tearing the letter into pieces.]

My friend will call upon your lordship!

[He gently fills the torn pieces into LORD FOPTOWN's face.]

FOPTOWN

[Bowing, and flicking the scraps of paper from his lace].

Shall be most charmed!

I

[It is now late noon. The first flush of sunset appears in the sky.]

THE SPARKS

[To one another].

A challenge!

POYNTZ

[Warningly].

T'st! I spy

The ladies, now returning!

FOPTOWN

[To the SPARKS].

Shall we go

And meet them, fellow Sparks?

THE SPARKS

[Boisterously].

Yoicks! Tally-ho!

FOPTOWN

[Taking DAPPERWIT's arm and that of another SPARK].

Hark forward then! I'll tell upon the way

[To the SPARKS, with a triumphant glance at LORD PETRE.]

A strange, amusing thing I heard to-day!

[FOPTOWN moves away, accompanied by all the SPARKS. COLONEL POYNTZ and LORD PETRE are left together.]

POYNTZ

[Ruefully looking after LORD FOPTOWN].

Ay! the whole world will hear the story now
And laugh. Small blame to 'em!

PETRE

[Slowly moving to the stone seat].

The trick! How!—how

Was it achieved?

[He plants his foot upon the seat and ponders, his elbow on his knee, his chin in his hand.]

She chang'd the letter? Fiend!

POYNTZ.

Calf! by thine own act wert thou killed and skinned!
The knife that did the deed was twin to this!

[Tossing LORD PETRE the letter read at the beginning of the Act.]

Read, mark, and learn—all that has gone amiss,—
Thou hast thyself to thank for't?

PETRE

[Unfolding the letter and realizing the truth].

True, too true!

All's clear. . . . She had the letter meant for you!
O! fool! Besotted fool, hadst thou but known. . . .

[Throwing himself upon the seat in despair.]
'Twas thine own hand betrayed thee! . . .

POYNTZ.

Curse and groan!

'Twill mend thy blunder—woo Belinda back!

PETRE

[With passionate reproach].

You knew, you knew, and did not warn me, Jack!

POYNTZ.

There I was wrong!

PETRE.

Unfriendly!

POYNTZ.

'Tis confessed!

Thou know'st I never could resist a jest!

Forgive!

[Extending his hand.]

PETRE

[Taking the hand].

There!

POYNTZ

[A twinkle in his eye].

And Belinda—?

PETRE.

[With a gloomy smile].

Rest content . . .

Not long shall be delayed her punishment!

POYNTZ

[Taking snuff].

Sweet rogue! I'd punish her with kisses!

PETRE

[Jealously].

So!

You would, would you?

POYNTZ

[Taking snuff].

You're crabb'd . . . your cake is dough!

[The sunset flush grows deeper. A pale new moon rises over the tree-tops.]

PETRE.

It is, Sir, is it?

POYNTZ

[Jeeringly].

One fell stroke of Fate

Deprives you of the tender *tête-à-tête*.The flower—the mitten that you thought to win
From bright Belinda! Were you struggling in
Those Stygian depths you talk of—much I doubt
If she would spare one hair to help you out,
Much less a whole lock from her charming head!

PETRE

[Maddened by taunts, bursting out].

Now by these crimsoned heavens o'er us spread,
And yon pale phantom of a moon, I swear
Ere nightfall, I will have that lock of hair!

POYNTZ
[Lightly].

Not you!

PETRE.

I pledge my word to it!

POYNTZ

[Pulling out a betting-book].

Even odds

Against your chance?

PETRE

[Pulling out a betting-book].

Seven fifties!

POYNTZ

[Entering bet].

Done!

PETRE

[Seeing BELINDA approach].

Oddsbods!

She heaves in sight! . . . Leave me!

POYNTZ.

I understand!

[He nods knowingly and swaggers away, whistling
"Garryowen."]

PETRE

[Left alone].

Now aid me, aid me, brain and tongue and hand!

Some subtle stratagem I must devise

(Like to her own)—to gain the radiant prize!

Caution! She comes!—who drives me desperate—
To rival Scylla's crime—earn Scylla's fate!

[He leans upon the sun-dial, lost in thought. Enter
SERVANTS in livery, carrying silver and porcelain tea and coffee equipages, which they place
on tables in the pavilions. Chairs, cushions,
and carpets are arranged on the grass.]

GLEE-SINGERS

[Unseen].

I.

The social board with cups and spoons is crowned,
The berries crackle and the mill turns round!

On shining altars of Japan we raise
 The silver lamp; the fiery spirits blaze:
 From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide—
 And China's earth receives the smoking tide,
 At once are gratified both sense and taste
 And frequent cups prolong the rich repast!
 And frequent cups prolong the rich repast!

[*Re-enter BELINDA with LORD FOPTOWN and COLONEL POYNTZ, SIR PLUME with SACHARISSA, DAPPERWIT with LUCINDA, and all the SPARKS and LADIES. They group about the tea-tables. The SERVANTS attend upon them.*]

THE GLEE-SINGERS.

2.

In various talk the light hours glide away—
 Who gave the ball, or held the last *soiree*;
 One speaks the glory of the British Queen,
 And one describes a charming Indian screen,
 A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes:
 At every word a reputation dies:
 Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat
 With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that!
 With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that!

PETRE

[*The centre of a group of LADIES, reclining at CLARISSA's feet*].

Lovely Clarissa, dare I question why
 You scan my face with such a roguish eye?

CLARISSA

[*Tittering behind her fan*].

Faces, like letters, sometimes may deceive!

PETRE

[*Biting his lip*].

O! you have heard the story, I perceive!

LUCINDA

[*Tittering*].

And so have I, my lord!

ANOTHER LADY.

And I!

SACHARISSA.

And I!

O Lud! I laughed till I was like to die.
To think your lordship was so taken in!

[All the LADIES giggle.]

PETRE.

You know the proverb, "Let those laugh that win!"

BELINDA

[The centre of a group of GENTLEMEN].

Ha! ha!

[Laughing triumphantly and loudly as she darts a defiant glance at LORD PETRE.]

PETRE.

You may laugh, Madam; you have won!

BELINDA.

My sex may thank me for a service done
In teaching yours, my lord, more guardedness! . . .
Who boasts henceforth, with reason more or less,
Of ladies' letters, will, I make no doubt,
Learn what is in them ere he reads them out!
Else for presumption, vanity may atone!

[She haughtily turns her back.]

PETRE.

Compunction dies, my heart is turned to stone!

[To CLARISSA, playing with her châtelaine.]

Fairest Clarissa, ere the glowing noon
Fades into twilight and this day of June
Like some bright gauzy-winged ephemeral fly
Robb'd of its sunshine, flutters down to die,—
Hear but my prayer!—

BELINDA

[Jealously watching LORD PETRE and CLARISSA].

He ogles her and sighs!

The minx! O, I could scratch out both her eyes!

PETRE.

Grant me one favor!

CLARISSA

[Coquettishly].

If the boon you seek

Can be conferred without a crimson'd cheek?

PETRE.

Madam, it can, though complaisance were sin !

Blushes went out, you know, when paint came in !

[Quickly, as CLARISSA pouts and frowns.]

'Tis but a keepsake that I crave !

CLARISSA

[Flattered].

Explain !

PETRE.

This pair of scissors from your *châtelaine* !

CLARISSA.

What need have men of scissors ?—

BELINDA

[To herself].

O ! to hear

The things that he is whispering in her ear !

PETRE

[To Clarissa].

Madam, sometimes to cut a Gordian knot

And free the victim of a tangled plot !

CLARISSA.

Take then the scissors, since you wish them, Sir !

PETRE

[Rising, and accepting the scissors with a
profound bow].

I am not Midas, yet I will aver

When once again the weapon you behold,

These blades shall glitter with the purest gold !

[Triumphantly, sticking the scissors on his finger
and thumb.]

Thus ladies in Romance assist their knight,

Present the spear and arm him for the fight !

[He rises, and goes about amongst the COMPANY,
mingling and conversing with LADIES and
SPARKS, but continuing to draw nearer to
BELINDA.]

FOPTOWN

[Pressing his suit on BELINDA].

Madam, you know my wishes hang upon

Your lips !

BELINDA

[Missing PETRE].

Where is he? ,

FOPTOWN.

Pray you, answer!

BELINDA

[To herself].

Gone!

I choke!

PETRE

[Continuing stealthily to approach BELINDA, the scissors ready in his hand].

Nearer and nearer!

BELINDA.

Pitiless!

[She lifts her tea-cup with a trembling hand.]
How he detests me!

FOPTOWN

[In her ear].

Be my Marchioness!

BELINDA

[Stifling a sob in her tea-cup].

Alas! My hopes, my joys have fled away,
There is no sugar in life's cup of tea!

PETRE.

Be strong, my heart! My hand, be steady. So! . . .
When next she stoops her head to sip—

[He seizes one of BELINDA's curls and cuts it off.]

O! O!

BELINDA

[Shricking and starting up].

Mercy! What have you done!

PETRE.

To do. Behold!

All man may dare

[Brandishing the lock.]

BELINDA

[Screaming].

My hair! My HAIR! MY HAIR!

[Tremendous general sensation. The LADIES rush to and surround BELINDA; the GENTLEMEN encircle LORD PETRE, with excited gestures.]

PETRE

[Rhetorically].

Let wreaths of triumph now these temples twine,
 I have achieved, the glorious prize is mine!
 While fish love streams or birds delight in air,
 Or in a coach and six the British fair;
 While nymphs take treats or assignations give,
 So long my honor, name, and praise shall live!

[*All is clamor and hubbub. BELINDA, drowned in tears, and crimson with confusion, is the centre of a sympathizing group.*]

FOPTOWN

[*Drawing his sword.*].

Outrage so gross for retribution cries——

ALL THE SPARKS

[*Drawing their swords.*].

Restore the lock!

PETRE

[*Centre of a mob.*].

Never!

ALL THE SPARKS

[*Menacingly.*].

Apologize!

PETRE.

Not while life's vital spark inspires my frame!

[*Drawing his sword.*]

Stand aside! Let me pass!

ALL THE LADIES

[*Screaming.*].

O! mercy!

ALL THE GENTLEMEN.

Shame!

[*Tremendous hubbub.*]

PETRE

[*The centre of a circle of drawn swords, parrying the points that are menacing his breast.*].

I feel no shame, experience no remorse;
 Give up the lock, I will not!

[*He attempts to break through the hedge of swords, and is compelled to retreat.*]

'Tis your force
I own superior—not your rapier-play!
[With a sudden leap gaining the river-bank above
the landing-stairs.]
Ladies, your servant! Gentlemen, good day!
[He dives, sword in hand, from the river-bank and
disappears with a splash.]

FOPTOWN.

Escaped!

THE SPARKS.

Confusion!

[Tumult. All crowd towards the river-bank; necks
are craned to catch sight of the swimmer.]

BELINDA.

O! He's drowned!

[She swoons.]

ALL THE OTHER LADIES

[Screaming].

He's dead!

DAPPERWIT.

He dived!

FOPTOWN.

He rises!

SIR PLUME

[Standing on a chair].

Zounds! I see his head!

[Tremendous excitement.]

THE VOICE OF LORD PETRE

[Hailing in the distance].

Wherry!

DAPPERWIT.

He hails a boat!

[An answering hail.]

The swimmer's shout!

The rowers hear: they back oars—put about!

FOPTOWN.

He grasps the gunwale! See! they drag him in
Dripping!

ALL

[Laughing and applauding].

Ha! ha!

THE VOICE OF LORD PETRE
 [Receding in the distance].

The laugh is mine! I win!

THE GLEE-SINGERS

[Breaking in upon a Babel of exclamations].
 Day gently sinks beneath the empurpled sea,
 Evening descends on mountain, vale, and lea;
 Rising in beauty, Dian's silver beams
 Are mirrored in clear lakes and rushing streams;
 The thrush retires; light falls the pearly dew;
 The chafer hums, and the owl cries "Tu-whoo!"
 The chafer hums, and the owl cries "Tu-whoo!"

THE ACT DROP FALLS.

ACT III

SCENE I.—BELINDA's bedchamber, as in Act I. Nine o'clock, the evening of the same day. Moonlight streaming through the high windows, mingling with the rosy light of a small wood fire in a steel basket on the hearth. The draperies conceal the recess that contains the bed. Fresh tapers, not lighted, in the Sèvres candelabra on the mantelshelf and dressing-table. POMPEY squats motionless on the tapestry-covered tabouret.

The clock chimes nine. A tremulous strain of harp-music as the forms of the SYLPHS, at first diaphanous and filmy in the moonlight, gradually become distinct.

CRISPSSA

[Sorrowfully].

What dire offence from trifling causes springs!

TASSELLIO.

What mighty contests rise from trivial things!

BRILLIANTE.

Ah! when to mischief mortals bend their will,
 How soon they find fit instruments of ill!

ZEPHYRETTA.

What earthly motive, sister, could compel
 A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?

[ARIEL enters from the buhl cabinet. He is pale and profoundly depressed. One of his wings is partially missing; he carries the severed portion under his arm.]

ARIEL

[In accents broken by emotion, as the SYLPHS eagerly surround him].

Ask you the reason of that deed abhorred?
 The gentle belle had scorned the ignoble lord!
 Fired to revenge, desirous to offend—
 He planned the outrage, and attained his end!
 Reclin'd upon the nosegay in her breast
 I saw him come: his deadly purpose guessed . . .
 I viewed him spread the glittering forfex wide . . .
 To inclose the lock, "It shall not be!" I cried,
 And with despairing courage—

THE SYLPHS.

Interposed?

ARIEL.

Ay! but in vain! The fatal engine closed!

[A shriek of anguish from the SYLPHS.]

I owe this mutilation to the shears
 That robbed Belinda of her cherished hairs!

[Producing the severed portion of his wing, ARIEL sinks down overpowered with grief. The SYLPHS surround him in disconsolate attitudes.]

BRILLIANTE.

Woe!

[POMPEY rolls his eyes and grins with malevolent joy.]

TASSELLIO.

Misery!

ZEPHYRETTO.

Despair!

CRISPILLA.

That lock, so bright!

MOMENTILLA.

Alas!

ARIEL

[With a burst of sorrow].

I used to sleep in't every night!

POMPEY
[Chuckling].

Ho, ho!

BRILLIANTE.

What do I hear? What do I see?

[In alarm as POMPEY grimaces hideously.]

ZEPHYRETTO.

Nought but a fetish carved in ebony!

BRILLIANTE

[With a shriek].

It moves!

CRISPSSA.

Grimaces!

TASSELLIO.

Lives!

[The SYLPHS cling together in alarm as POMPEY rises to his feet upon the stool.]

ARIEL

[Relieved].

'Tis but a slave

A rich admirer to Belinda gave

Some three days since! . . .

[A pair of crimson bat's wings suddenly rise from POMPEY's shoulders. Two curved scarlet horns tipped with fiery sparks spring from the summit of his turban.]

Horror! What art thou?

THE SYLPHS.

Who?

POMPEY.

No sable child of Obeah or Voodoo!

[To ARIEL, leaping down from the stool.]

Ay! Bleach and tremble! Thou dost know me well!

ARIEL

[Falteringly].

Thou art that spiteful gnome called Umbriel!

POMPEY

[Now UMBRIEL].

The enemy of thee and all thy race!

[With triumphant malice.]

'Tis I have marred with freckles many a face

Whose lily fairness was your chiefest boast.

'Tis I who bring to bear a countless host;
Of subtle arts and venom'd spells to blight
The mortal charms ye cherish!

ARIEL.

Baleful sprite

I know it well!

UMBRIEL.

'Tis I who have increased
By inches, the circumference of the waist,
Once tight and trim, and round, and neat, and jimp;
'Tis I who rasp the hands and chap the lip.

[A moan from the SYLPHS.]

'Tis I who rasp the hands and chap the lip.

Ay! plant upon the nose's veriest tip
The flaunting pimple, roseate of hue!

[Rubbing his hands.]

'Tis I who ambush in the spiced ragout
The onion that attaints the sweetest sigh
And robs a Juliet's kiss of poetry!

[With a shrill chuckle.]

Confess 'tis I!

ARIEL.

We own thy power to harm,
Yet has it robbed Belinda of one charm?

UMBRIEL.

Not yet?

ARIEL.

Thou dost admit thine impotence
To dim or tarnish that bright excellence?

UMBRIEL.

I did, until a kinsman rich and old
Dropped at her door his burdening load of gold
Some three months since!

ARIEL

[Scornfully].

Does gold mar Beauty?

UMBRIEL.

Elf!

What is the food of Avarice, but pelf?
Pride, Arrogance, Suspicion and Distrust
Are basilisks that breed in golden dust;

Nursed in Belinda's breast, have these not power
To undermine and canker, hour by hour? [Chuckling.]

ARIEL

[*Recoiling*].

Arch-traitor. This thy plot?

UMBRIEL.

[*Coolly producing a snuff-box*].

Ay! If't should fail

By other means I may in the end prevail.

Jealousy . . . !

[*Helping himself to snuff; a flash of fire at each pinch.*]

BELINDA

[*Sobbing behind the bed-curtains*].

Oh!

UMBRIEL.

And outraged love may wreak

The desired havoc in that lovely cheek, . . .

[*Capering in delight.*]

Redden the eyelids. Turn those radiant eyes
Into a pair of bottled gooseberries—!

ARIEL.

I can endure no more! Look! and confess
That Beauty may be beauteous in distress!

[ARIEL, with an imperious gesture, waves his hand
towards the curtains that conceals the alcove.
They part, revealing BELINDA in a loose robe
of transparent black crêpe, lying on the bed,
where she has sobbed herself to sleep. Her face
is hidden on her bare arm, over which her
dishevelled hair falls in disorder.]

BELINDA.

Ah! me!

[*She moves, revealing her face.*]

UMBRIEL

[*With a yell of agony*].

Chagrin! 'Tis true!

[*He writhes in torture.*]

ARIEL

[Imperiously].

Defeated gnome!

Back to thy dismal subterranean dome!

Avaunt!

[Waving UMBRIEL away.]

BRILLIANTE.

Retire!

ZEPHYRETTO.

Vanish!

CRISPISSA.

Begone!

TASSELLIO.

Hence!

MOMENTILLA.

Fly!

UMBRIEL

[To ARIEL].

To-night decides which wins her. Thou, or I!

[A flash of lightning and a peal of thunder.]

UMBRIEL vanishes.]

ARIEL

[To the SYLPHS].

Footsteps! Away!

[A strain of harp music. ARIEL retires into the cabinet, the SYLPHS disappear. There is a knock at the door.]

BELINDA

[Waking].

Heigho!

BETTY

[Peeping cautiously round the door].

Does Madam wake?

BELINDA

[Sitting up, drooping and despondent].

What is't?

BETTY

[Entering with a lighted taper].

Why mun! some gentlefolks to make

Inquiries, compliments, an' like o' that!

My Lady—

[*She lights the candles on the writing-table and those in the wall-scones.*]

BELINDA

Ugh!

[*She leaves the bed.*]

BETTY

[*Pulling down the curtains concealing the alcove.*].

Mistress Clarissa!

BELINDA

[*Viciously to herself.*].

Cat!

Whom else, child?

[*Taking a large old-fashioned silver bodkin from the writing-table.*].

BETTY

[*Lighting candles on mantelpiece.*].

Mr. Pope, Sir Plume (*mimicking*), hee-hee!

BELINDA

[*Savagely pinning up her hair with the bodkin.*].

Tell 'em I'm dead and buried!

BETTY

[*Courtseying at the door.*].

Here they be!

[*Enter LADY TOPINOTT, LUCINDA, SACHARISSA, CLARISSA in hoods and mantles, POPE and SIR PLUME.*]

LADY TOPINOTT

[*Surveying BELINDA through a spy-glass.*].

Alack!

[*Betty goes out.*]

SACHARISSA

[*Surveying BELINDA.*].

La!

CLARISSA

[*Surveying BELINDA with secret triumph.*].

Here's a change 'twixt morn and night!

SIR PLUME.

Tut!

[*They surround BELINDA, POPE remaining in the background.*]

BELINDA.

Speak your minds, pray! Say I look a fright!
 [Looking defiantly, but with a trembling lip, from one to another.]

ALL THE VISITORS, except POPE
 [Exchanging glances].

Humph!

BELINDA

[To LUCINDA, CLARISSA, and SACHARISSA].

You were vastly kind to hunt me out,
 On your way home to dress you for the rout,
 To glean some crumbs of gossip to content
 The curious and the impertinent!

[With a heaving bosom and flashing eyes, she sits on the couch, tapping her foot angrily on the floor.]
 [LADY TOPINOTT, LUCINDA, CLARISSA, SACHARISSA, and SIR PLUME again exchange glances and sit.]

LADY TOPINOTT.

You wrong Clarissa, niece. She pities you!

CLARISSA.

Truly!

BELINDA.

Who asked her?

LADY TOPINOTT.

Sacharissa too

Deplores your loss.

SACHARISSA

[Giggling].

Ay! poor dear ill-used thing!

LUCINDA.

Sure I could cry my eyes out!

BELINDA.

There's the sting!

Pity! I loathe 't!

SIR PLUME.

Where will presumption stop?

A lady's hair from off her head to chop!

Earthquakes and cataclysms! [BELINDA stops her ears.]

LADY TOPINOTT.

Wretched girl!

When the rude peer displays that captured curl
 What horrid things, think you, will people say?

[*Raising her head and speaking in a voice broken by rising sobs.*].

Forever cursed be this detested day!
 Happy! ah, ten times happy had I been
 If Hampton Court these eyes had never seen!
 What moved my mind with youthful lords to roam!
 Oh, had I stayed, and said my prayers at home!

[*CLARISSA and the other LADIES are affected to tears.*]

'Twas this, the morning omens seemed to tell;
 Thrice from my trembling hand the patch-box fell;
 The tottering china shook without a wind,
 Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind!
 A sylph, too, warned me of the threats of Fate
 In mystic visions, now believed too late! [*Frantically.*]
 See, the poor slighted remnant of the theft!
 My hands shall rend what Petre's rapine left . . . !

ALL THE LADIES

[*Rushing to her.*].

No, no!

[*They sink around BELINDA in imploring attitudes.*]

BELINDA

[*Centre of the group.*].

O! had he been content to seize
 Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!

[*To SIR PLUME, imploringly.*]

Say, cousin, shall my favorite curl, his prize,
 Exposed through crystal to appraising eyes,
 And heightened by the diamond's circling rays,
 On the rapacious hand of Petre blaze?

SIR PLUME

[*Roused to an outburst of chivalrous enthusiasm, springing to his feet.*].

Sooner shall grass in Hyde Park Circus grow
 And wits take lodgings in the sound of Bow!
 Sooner let Earth, Air, Sea, to chaos fall, . . .
 Men, monkeys, parrots, lap-dogs, perish all!

BELINDA.

Thou wilt avenge me?

SIR PLUME

[With determination].

Ay!

LADY TOPINOTT

[Rushing to him].

My son!

SIR PLUME.

My chair.

My hat! My cane! I'll trounce the dog, I swear!

LADY TOPINOTT AND SACHARISSA

[Clinging to him].

Reflect!

CLARISSA.

Beware!

LUCINDA.

Consider what you do!

SIR PLUME

[Valiantly to BELINDA].

Say, shall I cane him black or cane him blue?

BELINDA

[Haughtily turning away].

Choose your own color, Sir!

POPE

[Ringing the bell].

You wear a green

Vastly becoming—to be skewered in!

SIR PLUME.

Skewered, Sir?

[Popc]

[Coolly].

Riddled, spitted, pinked, or trussed!

Steel has five ways of giving dust to dust!

And, take my word for it, ere you shall fall,

My lord the Baron will have proved 'em all

Upon your body! [A SERVANT appears at the door.]

ALL THE LADIES, except BELINDA.

Horror!

SIR PLUME

[To the SERVANT].

Call a chair!

[The SERVANT goes out.]

I go, to beard this ravisher of hair

Without delay! [Valorously.]

THE SERVANT'S VOICE

[In the street below].

Chair, chair! A link, a link!

SIR PLUME.

And tell him—very gently—what I think!

[SIR PLUME goes gingerly out.]

LADY TOPINOTT

[Following him off].

Brave boy!

CLARISSA and LUCINDA

[Following].

Heroic youth!

SACIARISSA

[Following].

My dauntless Plume!

In that barbed glance I read the opponent's doom.

O thou whose valor pygmies Scanderbeg's.

Fortune assist thine arms!

POPE.

And speed thy legs!

When caution counsels valor to turn tail!

[To BELINDA, who has sunk down sobbing on the couch.]

Madam, I pray you do not weep and wail!

Think of the friends you grieve!

BELINDA

[Through her sobs].

I've none!

POPE.

[Taking a hand-mirror from toilet-table].

An't please

You, think then, Madam, of your enemies!

And check in prudence this excess of spleen

Lest it should spoil your beauty!

[He holds the glass to BELINDA.]

BELINDA

[*Taking the glass and sitting up*].

Were I lean,

Freckled, ill-favored, sallow as a ghost,
Unfit to reign as belle, to rule as toast—[*Surveying herself in the glass*.]

If all the wealth of charms reflected here

The blighting hand of sickness were to sear, . . .

Were these luxuriant tresses bleached to white,

These ripe cheeks withered, these eyes robbed of light . . .

Still, still should I be sought! still, still be sued,

By small men, great men, polished men and rude; . . .

By perfumed courtiers and by greasy cits,

By spendthrifts, misers, dandies, dullards, wits!

Alike enthralled by the enchanting power

Of the stuffed money-bags that form my dower; . . .

Willing to wed a mummy, or a block—

For twenty thousand in Potosi stock!

POPE.

[*Suddenly*].

Madam, a rumor flies about the town

That—H'm

[*Looking doubtfully at BELINDA*.]

BELINDA.

That, Sir?

[*With a gleam of interest*.]

POPE.

[*Watching her keenly*].

Potosi stocks are down!

BELINDA.

I care not!

POPE.

[*To himself*].

Good!

[*To BELINDA*.]

But, Madam, should they drop

Lower, you're—

BELINDA.

Well?

POPE.

You're ruined!

BELINDA.

Let 'em flop

POPE.

What, say you so? [To himself.] The lesson has borne
fruit!

BELINDA.

Money of all my grief's the bitter root.

O! I could cry to Heaven upon my knee,

[Sinking upon her knees.]

Give, give me back the days of poverty!

I knew no fear, no base suspicion then,

I trusted women, and believed in men!

[Sobbing and weeping, BELINDA droops her head upon the knee of POPE, who bends over her, tenderly placing his hand upon her hair. A triumphant burst of harp music, mingled with a roll of distant thunder. The doors of the buhl cabinet fly open, revealing ARIEL.]

ARIEL.

Triumph! [A flash of lightning. UMBRIEL is revealed.]

UMBRIEL

[Writhing].

Defeat!

THE SYLPHS

]Chanting in distance].

The ordeal is o'er!

UMBRIEL

I sink to darkness, to return no more!

[Lightning; thunder. UMBRIEL vanishes, ARIEL disappears. The cabinet doors clap to. An ascending scale of harp chords, dying gradually away.]

POPE.

[Drying BELINDA's eyes.]

There, there!

BELINDA

[Recovering and rising].

I thank you: I am better now!

POPE.

Come, let me see thee smile again! I vow

There's sunshine breaking through the clouded skies

To dry the drowning violets in your eyes

Already. So, I take my crutch [suiting the action to the words] and leave, [Kissing BELINDA's hand.]

But, ere I go, this counsel pray receive. . . .

[With real earnestness underlying mock solemnity.]
Go to the Duchess's to-night!

BELINDA

[Turning sadly away].

Nay, nay!

POPE

[Whispering persuasively in her ear].

Be brave as thou art beautiful. Be gay,
Not grievous: daring, not disconsolate,
And on the unkind in kind retaliate!

BELINDA.

What, Sir?

POPE

[In a tone of mock tragedy, waving his crutch].

Revenge, O foully injured fair!

Scissors for scissors call and hair for hair! [Retreating.]

BELINDA

[Puzzled].

Scissors—?

POPE.

Should Opportunity espouse thy cause,
Snip, snip and spare not! [Limping gaily out.]

BELINDA

[Pursuing him].

Stay, Sir!

POPE'S VOICE.

[In the distance, descending stairs].

Farewell!

BELINDA

[At door].

Pause

One moment! . . . Gone!

[Coming back as the hall door below is heard to shut.]

How strange his words! His air
How full of mystery!

[BETTY enters rather out of breath.]

BETTY.

Madam!

BELINDA
[Pondering].

BETTY. "Hair for hair!" . . .

Here's Mossoo Parvisol be come to pray
The parcel-silver'd shears he left to-day.

BELINDA.

"Snip!" [Imitating POPE's gesture.]
BETTY.

Madam—

BELINDA.

Shears! Why, did the Frenchman trip
Upstairs and fetch 'em for himself, child!

[As BETTY goes out.]

"Snip!"

What did he—could he mean? I cannot tell!

[Impatiently throwing herself into a chair.]
Deuce take me if I!—

[Enter PARVISOL quickly, shown in by BETTY. He
is resplendent, pompous, and bustling as before.]

PARVISOL

[Bowng superbly].

Bon soir, Mademoiselle!

I call for—

[BETTY goes into the closet.]

BELINDA.

Ah, your shears!

PARVISOL.

Upon my way
To a young gentilmian of *qualité*,
Milor Sir Baron Petre, zat Monsieur

[Smirking.]
Who steal so sly ze lock of 'air from you.

BELINDA

[Rising].

You frizz that wretch, whom most of all I hate,
Abhor, loathe, scorn, despise, and execrate?

PARVISOL.

Non, but I send, and pray Milor to sit
Zat I may dress an 'ead so full of wit!

C'est un bel homme, vraiment! un homme d'esprit!

[*Taking snuff.*]

Ze town is talk of noting else, *pardi!*

BELINDA

[*Pierced with a sudden idea, drawing nearer to PARVISOL.*]

You know my wrong! Avenge me!

PARVISOL

[*Starting back.*]

Sacrébleu!

BELINDA

[*Gliding to the side of PARVISOL and hissing the words in his ear.*]

Name your own price!

PARVISOL

[*Retreating.*]

Vat would you 'ave me do?

BELINDA.

Approach the Baron thus. Disguise your fears,
Seize your occasion and employ the shears!

Snip, snip, and spare not! [Tragically.]

[*BETTY re-enters from the closet with a large pair of silver-handled shears.*]

BETTY.

[*Holding up the shears.*]

Madam, here they are!

PARVISOL

[*Recovering from his surprise.*]

I vill Milor inform of zis, begar!

[*He is strutting consequently towards the door, when BELINDA intercepts him.*]

BELINDA

[*Wrought to frenzy, drawing the silver bodkin from her hair.*]

See'st thou this bodkin?

BETTY.

[*Screaming.*]

Lawks!

PARVISOL

[*Appalled, retreating.*]

Mort de ma vie!

BELINDA.

Tremble, vile minion!

PARVISOL.

Vill you murder me?

BELINDA.

Swear to be silent, else, despite brocade,
In thy base breast I sheathe this glittering blade!

[She advances upon PARVISOL, who retreats backwards in terror.]

PARVISOL.

Aie!

[He stumbles at the threshold of the closet, rushes in, slams the door, and is heard to bolt it on the other side.]

BETTY.

Madam's mad!

[Running to the bell.]

BELINDA.

No more than he or you.

BETTY.

But—

BELINDA.

Ask not what I dare, nor what I do!

'Tis fated I must enterprise alone,

And with this weak hand strike the dastard down!

[With heaving bosom and flashing eyes.]

If by one step Honor might be retrieved,

Revenge accomplished and repute achieved,

That I should take that step, sure Fate denotes,

Ay! though it take me—out of petticoats!

[Loudly, through the keyhole of the closet.]

Dost hear me! Ho! within there! Ho, I say!

PARVISOL

[Letting down the sash-window in the door of the closet and putting his head timidly out].

Command vat you shall please . . . I vill obey!

BELINDA

[Imperiously].

Bow to my will, which opposition loathes;

Garment by garment, hand me out your clothes!

Resign your coat, your waistcoat—your cravat!

Your cane, your handkerchief, your wig, your hat!

BETTY

[Beginning to enter into the joke].

O, mun!

PARVISOL

[Within closet].

Sacré tonnerre! Zare!

[Throwing out the different articles of his costume one after another.]

Take zem all!

BELINDA

[Gathering the articles up].

With these, with these I'll triumph or I'll fall!

[To BETTY.]

Say, shall my wily foeman's piercing eyes

Search out Belinda in this ape's disguise?

[Tossing the clothes to BETTY.]

BETTY.

Nay, Madam, summat's lacking to your plan!

BELINDA.

Child?

BETTY.

All beänt here that goes to make a man!

BELINDA.

H'm! [Calling.] Monsieur Parvisol!

PARVISOL

[Peeping out of the closet bald-headed.]

You call-a me?

Vat more you vant? I give you all, *pardi!*

BELINDA.

Bandy no words with me, thou caitiff slave!

Doff, and at once, the hostages I crave.

Resign those garments which ere Adam's fall

Our primal parent did not wear at all;

Yet to his sons bequeathed, a heritage

Changing in shape with each successive age,

No more the badge of shame and sorrow pale,

The proud insignia of the Tyrant Male!

To each new generation still the same—

Though Fashion dub them with a newer name. . . .

Why should a lively blush bepaint my cheek

When I endeavor but that name to speak?

Why should false modesty my tongue restrain?
 Millions of wives have worn the things I mean
 Since shrill Xantippe earned the name of shrew—
 And when I wed, I mean to wear 'em too!
 So, Sir, dispensing with all further speeches—
 I'll Trouble You To Let Me Have Your Breeches!

[PARVISOL *throws the breeches out of the closet window, they are caught by BETTY. She holds them up admiringly to BELINDA, who strikes a superb attitude of triumph.*]

PICTURE.

DARKNESS AND QUICK CHANGE OF SCENE.

SCENE II.—LORD PETRE's *Lodgings in St. James.* An oblong apartment handsomely furnished in the style of the period. Hangings, draperies, and furniture-covers of Indian chintz; the whole scheme of color rather dark in tone. Double doors, leading to the entrance hall. A central archway with chintz curtains, now drawn back, revealing a glimpse of the interior of a dining-room. (Dessert on mahogany table, candelabra with wax lights burning, decanters, and glasses.) A fireplace. Pier glass above, gilt framed; china branched candlesticks holding wax lights, burning. Against the wall a marble-topped console-table between two high windows. The window-blinds are up, revealing dark street and lights in opposite houses. Noise of traffic in thoroughfare outside. Above the console-table a pier-glass, gilt framed, surmounted by the figure of a flying Cupid. On console-table a pair of silver candlesticks supporting clusters of wax lights burning, a set of silver-gilt toilet plate, crystal perfume-bottles. A dress sword, the hilt jewelled; gloves, a mask, some diamond buckles and other articles of adornment. A door leading to the sleeping-chamber. A table, upon which is something lightly covered with a fine lawn handkerchief, lace-edged. The table is flanked by two high-backed arm-chairs. A short-

legged, high-backed, chints-covered lounge. Whips, canes, foils, guns in racks. Family portraits (principally ancestresses, by Holbein, Van Dyck, and Lely) on the walls.

TIME—10 P.M. of the same day.

[As the curtain rises a burst of laughter is heard, and the sound of chairs being pushed back.

LORD PETRE, COLONEL POYNTZ, and several GENTLEMEN are discovered standing round the table in the dining-room with lifted glasses.]

PETRE.

Belinda!

[He drinks.]

THE GUESTS.

To Belinda! [Drinking.]

[SLEEKING, a smart valet, enters, showing in SIR CHARLES DAPPERWIT and SIR PLUME, whose air of pompous impatience does not conceal his timorousness. Both GENTLEMEN are cloaked and wear their hats.]

PETRE.

Thus I pour

Libations to the gods of Love and War!

[He breaks his glass as SLEEKING passes into the dining-room.]

SLEEKING

[At LORD PETRE's elbow].

My lord, two gentlemen!

[Whispering.]

PETRE

[To the COMPANY].

Some friends of mine;

Pardon me that I leave you to your wine.

[He comes out of the dining-room.]

I have the honor?

[DAPPERWIT and SIR PLUME remove their hats, throw back their cloaks, and bow simultaneously.]

Curse this dusky room!

Sleeking, more lights! [Recognizing DAPPERWIT.]
Sir Charles?

[SLEEKING brings a silver-branched candlestick with lighted tapers from the dining-room, sets it on the table, draws the portiere before the entrance to the dining-room, and goes out softly.]

DAPPERWIT

[Bowing].

The same!

PETRE

[Turning to SIR PLUME].

Sir Plume?

SIR PLUME.

None other, Sir! [With burlesque dignity.]

DAPPERWIT

[Courteously to SIR PLUME].

Oblige me and precede!

SIR PLUME.

You entered first, Sir!

DAPPERWIT.

Pray!

SIR PLUME.

Nay!

PETRE

[Aside to DAPPERWIT].

Give a lead!

He balks the hedge!

DAPPERWIT.

Baron, you doubtless guess
I come here on behalf of the Marquess
Of Foptown.

PETRE.

Charmed! 'Tis not an hour ago
I sent a friend to him: a blade you know!

Jack!

[Calling.]

[COLONEL POYNTZ enters from the dining-room.]

POYNTZ.

Here, old bully!

PETRE.

Settle time and place,
I read Sir Plume's impatience in his face.

[To SIR PLUME.]

Now, Sir!

SIR PLUME

[*Stammering*].My lord—my lord—my lord——!
PETRE.

'Fore Gad!

How many lords?

SIR PLUME,

I say it is too bad!
PETRE.

Too bad, Sir; what, Sir?

SIR PLUME,

Sir, do you deny——?

PETRE.

No, nor admit, Sir. Well, Sir?

SIR PLUME

[*Floundering*].

Why, why, why!

'Zounds! 'Twas to-day at—you know!

PETRE

[*Tormentingly*].

Where, where, where?

SIR PLUME,

'Tis past a jest. Give back the lady's hair!

Nay, prithee!

PETRE

[*Courteously*].

I protest it gives me pain,—

Who speaks so well should ever speak in vain. . . .

SIR PLUME

[*To himself*].I knew that I should frighten him. My glance
Owns power to terrify as to entrance![*Striking an awe-inspiring attitude.*]

PETRE

[*Whipping the handkerchief from the table*].Behold this altar to great Cupid built
Of twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt;
[*Taking a wax taper from the table, which he uses
in the manner of a showman's wand.*]Here lie three garters, half a pair of gloves,
And all the trophies of my former loves;

Verses and billets-doux complete the pyre
 Which,—hold the candle, Jack!—[*lighting the taper at the candle*], which now I fire!

[*Kindling the pile of letters, etc.*]

This deed accomplished, leaves me no retreat;

Return, Sir Envoy, to Belinda's feet.

Repeat my words, recount what you have seen,

And—

SIR PLUME.

Plague me, Sir, if I smoke what you mean!

PETRE.

My meaning may be read by all who run.

'Tis not to yield one hair, nor half a one!

[*Drawing from his breast BELINDA's lock neatly tied up with blue ribbon.*]

I will defend my prize, be it understood,

With every weapon wielded since the Flood,

[*Advancing upon SIR PLUME, who retreats in alarm.*]

The shepherd's sling that grim Goliath slew,

Or Robin Hood's tough bow of British yew.

I will encounter you upon the field

With spear and targe—with knightly lance and shield.

[*The heads of several GENTLEMEN are thrust between the curtains masking the entrance to the dining-room.*]

With mace or matchlock, broadsword, bill or pike,

Gun, pistol, rapier, dagger—which you like!

Stake out a ring—I'll meet you in the lists,

Pumps on my feet and nothing on my fists!

Or choose you wilder warfare still—go hang! [*Loudly.*]

Bring out your blowpipe and your boomerang!

[*SIR PLUME, tripping over a footstool, sits suddenly down upon the carpet.*]

POYNTZ, DAPPERWIT, AND THE OWNERS OF THE HEADS

[*Bursting out into a laugh.*].

Ha, ha!

PETRE.

But by this sacred lock, I vow,

Ne'er shall it leave the breast that guards it now!

[*The Heads disappear behind the curtains as SLEEKING enters, showing in the MARQUESS OF FOPTOWN and POPE. Both are cloaked and hatted. FOPTOWN is in riding dress, booted, and carries a crop.*]

SLEEKING

[*Announcing*].

Marquess of Foptown!

PETRE.

[*Surprised*].

Zounds!

SLEEKING

And Mr. Pope!

[*Exit SLEEKING.*]

PETRE

[*Meeting POPE cordially*].

Sir, you are very welcome here. I hope I see you well?

POPE.

Why, so, so!

PETRE

[*Stiffly*].

If I fail

In courtesy, Marquess—

FOPTOWN.

'Tis not *en règle*

That I present myself, your glances say,
After the quarrel that occurred to-day;

But 'twas inevitable. Hear me out!

I picked a quarrel, Sir, to bring about
A duel. Now—

PETRE.

Now?

FOPTOWN

[*Smiling drily*].

I am not so keen

To meet you at twelve paces on the green
Or measure rapiers.

PETRE

[*Slowly*].

This is somewhat strange!

FOPTOWN.

Sir, there is panic on the Stock Exchange.
Potosi shares are down!

SIR PLUME

[*Starting*].

Hey?

PETRE

[*Shrugging his shoulders*].

'Cannot see

Where you are driving, for the life of me!

FOPTOWN.

The Company is bankrupt past all hope,
I have a witness here in Mr. Pope,
Who climbed your doorstep as I checked my mare...

PETRE

[*Eagerly to Pope*].

Pray, Sir, explain!

POPE.

Who can explain a scare?

This afternoon in Whitehall, Sir, I met
Dean Swift; fresh from Lord Oxford's cabinet.
He whispered to my private ear the thing
With which the Exchange, the Bank and Cheapside ring
To-night.

SIR PLUME

[*Bursting out*].

'Odds-bods! Belinda's ruined!

FOPTOWN.

Ay!

She has small cause to bless the Fates to-day!
The haughty belle, like many a low-bred boor,
Rose rich this morning, and will lie down,—poor!

PETRE.

Alas, dear lady!

FOPTOWN

[*Coolly*].

So I would postpone
The affair; lest the world deem her cause my own!

PETRE

[*In wrathful astonishment*].

What?

SIR PLUME

[*Pushing forward*].Why, 'fore Gad! My lord, if you presume
To trifle with this lady—

FOPTOWN.

Well, Sir Plume?

SIR PLUME

[*Stuttering*].'Zounds! Sir,—I hate all incivility—
But you're a—,

FOPTOWN.

What, Sir?

SIR PLUME.

It don't matter—hee!

FOPTOWN.

Nay, Sir, it matters much, and I propose
(Your ears being long enough)—to pull your nose!

SIR PLUME.

[*Aghast*].

My nose?

FOPTOWN.

Unless some other ass you've choused
Out of the feature—your nose! [Advancing.]

SIR PLUME

[*Mildly*].When I'm roused
I'm very terrible, so have a care!
Think if I were to strike you! . . .

FOPTOWN.

Bag of air!

Elder-pith puppet! dandelion-crown . . .

[*Striking SIR PLUME.*]

SIR PLUME

[*On the carpet*].

One moment more, and I had knocked him down!

FOPTOWN.

[*To LORD PETRE*].As for Belinda, Sir you understand
I have withdrawn my offer for her hand . . .

She will return my gifts,—a silver lace,
 A negro page, a jewell'd tweezer-case,
 And with her debts some doting husband curse—
 POPE

[*Interposing as LORD PETRE is about to burst out indignantly*].

Who loves her person better than her purse?

FOPTOWN

[*Coolly taking snuff*].

Beggars should wed with beggars!

POPE.

Were that true,

A fitting mate had Poverty in you;
 Whom despite rank and wealth, clear eyes may see
 Pauper'd in Honor and in Chivalry!

FOPTOWN

[*Sneeringly*].

Children and cripples, Sir, are privileged.

POPE.

Truth is the weapon of the child. The edged
 Retort, the biting jest, the epigram,
 With these the cripple fights, your lordship!

FOPTOWN

[*To himself*].

Damn!

Could I not let the stinging hornet be!
 I shall be riddled through with raillery!

POPE

[*Pulling out tablets and pencil with a flourish*].

Draw, my lord. [Loudly]. Draw! Defend yourself!

[*A stir behind the curtains. The heads of the GENTLEMEN reappear, curiosity stamped on each face.*]

POPE

[*Jotting rapidly down*].

Gadso!

My wit was rusting in the scabbard.

FOPTOWN

[*Turning away*].

Pho!

For jesting, Sir, I am not in the mood!

POPE

[*Affecting not to hear, reading as he writes*].
"The cautious Foptown——"

POYNTZ.

Good!

PETRE.

Extremely good!

THE LISTENERS

[*Sotto voce to each other*].

Capital!

POPE.

No!

[*Dissatisfied with the commencement, he begins again.*]

FOPTOWN

[*Haughtily*].

Such warfare I disdain,

So, quit the field!

PETRE

[*Interposing sternly*].

Marquess, you will remain.

FOPTOWN

[*Angrily*].

"Will," Sir?

PETRE.

"Shall," "Must," an' you the term prefer!

FOPTOWN.

Insolent!

POPE.

Finished!

PETRE, POYNTZ, DAPPERWIT, AND THE LISTENERS.

Read!

FOPTOWN

[*Sneeringly*].

Ay, let us hear!

POPE

[*Reading gravely*]."Foptown the rich Belinda woos apace
And sends his heart to her in a tweezer-case!
Fortune recalls her favors—friends depart:
Cries Foptown, 'Madam,—give me back my heart!'

It reached your hands in error. Pray you see
Here my real love's initials—L. S. D."

EVERYBODY, *except* POPE AND LORD FOPTOWN
[Roaring with laughter].

Ha, ha!

POPE

[Putting up the tablets].

Let who would see the lines in print
Purchase to-morrow's *Tatler* and peep in't!
My lord, your servant! [Bowing to FOPTOWN.]

FOPTOWN

[Stung to frenzy, seizing POPE].

Dwarf, despite your crutch,
You shall be beaten!

OMNES.

Coward!

PETRE

[Interposing].

Dare to touch

This gentleman!

[He forcibly releases POPE, sending LORD FOPTOWN
staggering across the room.]

FOPTOWN.

Hot, whiffing puppy! must

You—

[He whips out his sword and makes a vicious thrust
at LORD PETRE.]

POPE

[Deftly parrying the thrust with his cane].

Dwarfs can parry, Sir, as well as thrust.

FOPTOWN

[Furiously to LORD PETRE].

Out with your hanger!

PETRE.

Marquess, be content!

Not long shall be delayed the chastisement
You richly merit, who have dared to slight
A lady whom I honor.

THE LISTENERS

[Eagerly to one another].

'Gad, a fight!

[They crowd in from the dining-room. POYNTZ and DAPPERWIT move the table and take their places as seconds, LORD PETRE and LORD FOPTOWN engage.]

PETRE

[After a few passes].

You bleed!

FOPTOWN

[Glancing at his sword hand].

A scratch!

[The duellists engage again. LORD PETRE wounds LORD FOPTOWN.]

Ha! Curse you!

[Supported by DAPPERWIT.]

Give me air!

PETRE.

Thus all Belinda's enemies shall fare!

DAPPERWIT.

[To GENTLEMEN, supporting LORD FOPTOWN].

Help me convey him home!

TWO OF THE GENTLEMEN.

With pleasure!

[LORD PETRE wipes his sword-blade on cambric handkerchief, conversing with COLONEL POYNTZ.]

DAPPERWIT

[To POPE, who inquires anxiously].

Pho!

A trifling wound!

[LORD PETRE returns his sword to its scabbard and replaces it on the console.]

POPE.

Thank Heaven!

PETRE

[Gaily to OMNES].

Do you know,

Friends, cronies, gossips, boon companions stout,
'Tis time we made our toilets for the rout!

POYNTZ.

Au revoir!

[He goes out.]

OMNES.

Au revoir!

[DAPPERWIT and GENTLEMAN take their departure,
supporting LORD FOPTOWN, who has revived.
The hall-door is heard to open and shut.]

POPE.

[Who has lingered, advancing to PETRE].

My lord, I came

To plead with you; to expostulate—to blame
Perhaps, but—

PETRE.

But, Sir—?

POPE

[Extending his hand with a cordial smile].

Let the thing be owned!

If you have erred, my lord, you have atoned!

PETRE.

Would *she* think so, or have I sinned past hope?

[Drawing the lock from his breast.]

POPE

[Half playfully, half sadly].

You have had absolution from a Pope!

Belinda is inclined religiously,

And—Scripture bids her love her enemy!

Farewell!

[Limping out.]

PETRE

[At the door].

We meet to-night?

POPE'S VOICE

[From without].

At Queensberry House.

PETRE.

Belinda—?

POPE'S VOICE.

Will be there. Renew your vows!

Own her an angel—call yourself a brute!

[His crutch is heard tapping in the vestibule. The hall-door opens and shuts.]

PETRE.

I will—I do!

[Coming back, as SLEEKING enters carrying a short brocaded dressing-gown.]

[To SLEEKING.]

Lay out the watered suit.

[Taking off his coat.]

Untie my hair! [Glancing at his watch as SLEEKING obeys.] So late?

SLEEKING.

The French *coiffeur*

Was to be here at ten o'clock!

PETRE.

Monsieur

Parvisol? Give me here my casaquin.

Now fetch a porcelain plate and drop therein

These ten bright portraits of the sovereign's face,

The wealthy platter on the table place,

And let my snuff-box, open seem to invite

The Gallic nose to tingling delight.

What! Do you snigger, sirrah!

[As SLEEKING does as directed.]

SLEEKING.

No, my lord!

But [tittering], he, he, he! It seems so monstrous odd!

[Carriage-wheels heard below, and trampling of horses' feet on stone pavement.]

PETRE

[To SLEEKING].

He comes! The door!

[SLEEKING throws open the door as LORD PETRE takes his seat in the chair facing the pier-glass.]

Queen Anne must suit his whim

Or get no tweak or comb or irons from him!

[A moment of expectation. Then enter BELINDA disguised in PARVISOL's complete costume, wig, baldric, and all essentials. She hesitates a moment on the threshold, glances at SLEEKING, who remains in a stiff, respectful attitude near the door, then advances with desperate courage.]

[SLEEKING goes into the dining-room.]

BELINDA
[*Gasp ing*].

O Lud!

PETRE

[*Without turning*].

Cher Monsieur Parvisol, bon soir!

BELINDA

[*Stammering*].

B—b—b—

PETRE.

Je suis ravi de vous voir!

[BELINDA draws the shears from PARVISOL's baldric, and advances with nervous determination.]

I'm damned late, so, commences, je vous prie!

[BELINDA, screwing up her courage to the point of action, seizes him firmly by the back hair and cuts it off.]

What hast thou done?

[Springing to his feet in rage and consternation.]

BELINDA

[*Brandishing the hair and scissors*].

Avenged mine injury!

Scissors for scissors! Hair for hair!

PETRE.

'Tis you!

[*Oversetting his chair and rushing to seize her*.]

Belinda! Yield! or—

BELINDA.

[*Snatching the open snuff-box from table and throwing the contents in LORD PETRE's face*].

Take that!

PETRE

[*Sneezing violently*].

Atishoo!

[BELINDA rushes out. The hall door is heard to bang, the carriage to drive away.]

PICTURE.

LORD PETRE in paroxysms of sneezing. SLEEKING petrified with astonishment in the doorway of the dining-room.

ACT DROP.

ACT IV

SCENE.—*A reception-room at Queensberry House, the ceiling rising to a frescoed central dome in which are oval skylights. Double doors, supposed to lead to the music-room. Another pair of double doors, revealing when open a vista of the grand staircase and landing, where the DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY, a tall, handsome woman, superbly attired and surrounded by distinguished-looking persons of both sexes, receives her guests. White marble fireplace. Vases and superb Pompadour clock in cloisonnée upon it. Candelabra in white biscuit or crystal support galaxies of burning tapers. Two chandeliers of Venetian glass depend from the ceiling, which is painted after Boucher. Decorations and mouldings in white Italian plaster. Large wall-mirrors in flamboyant ormolu mountings. Furniture upholstered in white and gold brocade. Cabinets of Sevres porcelain, large vases of pink Worcester, Sevres, and green and gold cloisonnée. White carpet with festoons of Cupids and pink roses. Pictures by old French masters on the walls. A superb Watteau, which hangs very low, represents a fete champetre at Versailles. A settee. A splendid writing-table of ebony inlaid, near it a high-backed arm-chair. Other chairs, rout seats, tabourets, couches.*

TIME—11.30 P.M. *The same night.*

[At rise of the Curtain the room is crowded with GENTLEMEN and LADIES, powdered, frisée, and in gala dress. SERVANTS in the Queensberry liveries serve tea and chocolate. Centre of a knot of GENTLEMEN, CLARISSA, LUCINDA, and SACHARISSA, DAPPERWIT in attendance. COLONEL POYNTZ in conversation with several GENTLEMEN and LADIES. General buzz of conversation, through which is heard a selection from Handel's "Acis and Galatea," played by an Orchestra of stringed instruments within the music-room.]

DAPPERWIT.

[To CLARISSA].

You found Belinda pensive and oppressed?

CLARISSA.

Alas! what tumult raged within her breast!

LUCINDA.

What fury!

SACHARISSA.

What resentment!

CLARISSA.

What despair!

She raved, and wept, and tore her ravished hair!

[CLARISSA continues her narration, the GENTLEMEN listening eagerly, and SACHARISSA and LUCINDA confirming her at different points, as the voice of a MAJOR-DOMO on the grand staircase announces:—

MAJOR-DOMO.

Herr Handel! Mr. Pope!

[The doors are thrown open by liveried SERVANTS.

HANDEL and POPE are discovered centre of the brilliant group upon the landing, paying their compliments to the DUCHESS, who receives both GENTLEMEN with marked attention. HANDEL is a good-looking young German of twenty-eight (see contemporary portraits), attired in a suit of shot silk, gold embroidered, a perruque and sword. POPE wears a suit of black watered silk with cut steel buttons, a full-bottomed brown wig, and silver hilted sword. They enter arm in arm, the doors closing behind them. Both are immediately surrounded and overwhelmed with compliments.

SACHARISSA, CLARISSA, and LUCINDA

[To POPE].

O, Lud, Sir! pray

Present us to your charming protégé;

[POPE performs the introductions.]

A CRITIC

[To POPE].

Your "Ode on Saint Cecelia"—What a gift!

POPE.
[Drily].

The Devil's tribute to a Saint!

The CRITIC retires, crushed. A band of enthusiastic persons of both sexes sweep HANDEL off into the music-room.]

THE MAJOR-DOMO.

Dean Swift!

[*A buzz of excitement. Doors open as before, revealing SWIFT, a tall, burly, black-browed, full-jowled man of forty-five, in a full-bottomed wig, clerical gown and bands, in conversation with the DUCHESS, who detains him to whisper in his ear. He leaves her with a profound bow, and in company with a pompous PERSONAGE wearing a star and a ribbon: the CROWD of FASHIONABLES making a lane down which they pass, SWIFT returning arrogant nods to the bows and curtsies he receives.]*

SWIFT

[*In loud, blustering tones, tinged with a Dublin brogue, to the PERSONAGE.*]

He said I loved a Peer! 'Twas rightly guessed,
The best-bred dogs, your Grace, retrieve the best!

[*The PERSONAGE draws back discomfited. A little old GENTLEMAN with a snuffy shirt-frill, approaching SWIFT with great deference, attempts to whisper something.*]

What? [Taking snuff.] My deaf ear!

[Offering the other.]

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

[Anxiously].

Sir! my Potosi shares!

[*Those around listen anxiously for SWIFT's reply.*]

SWIFT

[*Glancing at the OLD GENTLEMAN'S soiled ruffles.*]
Give 'em your laundress, sir, for frill-papers.
They are worth—that! [Spanging snuff from his nail.]

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

[*Retiring discomfited.*]

I lose five hundred!

A GUEST.

I

Eight thousand!

[*A babel of voices. During the clamor SIR PLUME and LADY TOPINOTT have been announced. SIR PLUME is attired with fastidious elegance. and a curl of his periwig has been so arranged as to partly conceal a pronounced black eye.*]

POPE

[Joining SWIFT].

All are stung with Spanish fly !
SWIFT[*Centre of a GROUP OF LISTENERS*].

Sir, from the City I am newly come
To hear Italians squall and Germans thrum.
'Change Alley buzzes like an angry hive,
With frantic shareholders Cheapside's alive !
Lanterns and torches shed a fearful light
On staring eyes and faces ghastly white,
A howling, cursing, raving, sweating mob,
Yell for the blood of Burnett, Stokes, and Cobbe—

POYNTZ.

The three Directors ?

SWIFT.

Who were first to gain
Concessions—now revoked—from fickle Spain.
'Tis Bedlam loosed. [*Snuffing.*] They pelted me with
mud !

SIR PLUME.

So gross an insult would have fired my blood,
I should have drawn upon them—slain a score !
And stained my steel with base plebeian gore !

SWIFT

[*Jeeringly*].

Pray tell me, Sir...At your nativity
Were there no signs for gaping crowds to see
Betokening a hero's birth? Come, jog
Your memory. Did no tadpole turn a frog?

SIR PLUME

[*Haughtily*].

Sir!

SWIFT.

Did no blazing star the heavens adorn?
 Come, come! One calf was hatch'd—one gander born!
 [The COMPANY titter.]

SIR PLUME.

Pish!

SWIFT.

Though the latter statement ye'd deny,
 The fact's as obvious as—your black eye

SIR PLUME

[To COLONEL POYNTZ].

I had it painted. Is it coming through?

POYNTZ.

Ay! The right peacock colors—green and blue!

SIR PLUME

[Covering his eye with his hat].

Confusion!

SWIFT.

Try a raw beefsteak!

SIR PLUME

[The centre of a grinning crowd].

'Ods life!

POPE.

Apply a poker-knob!

DAPPERWIT.

Or carving-knife!

SIR PLUME.

To some unpeopled desert let me fly!

SACHARISSA.

Thy Sacharissa bears thee company.

What though one eye, arrayed in mourning hue,

Beweeps the deed a dastard dared to do:

Let but the other orb upon me shine

And I am happy!

SIR PLUME.

Take me! I am thine!

[SACHARISSA leads him affectionately away.]

POPE

[To himself anxiously].

Alas! Belinda, why dost thou delay?

The Baron, too; what is't keeps him away?

[*The Overture to Handel's "Saint Cecilia" commences. The GUESTS begin to stream into the music-room.*]

SWIFT

[*To POPE.*]

Little great Alexander, say how 'tis
I see your honor with so glum a phiz?

POPE.

You were too true a prophet!

SWIFT.

Bulls and bears!

Wert thou a holder of Potosi shares?

If so, hark in your ear. [*Whispering.*] Purchase South
Seas.

POPE.

Buy South Sea stock, Dean?

SWIFT

[*Glancing round.*]

Lower, if you please!

Spain has transferred the trade monopoly.

Parliament gulps the bait the Company

Have dangled at the Nation's chops. The Act

Will pass to-morrow, sirrah: and that's fact!

..

[*Clapping POPE on the shoulder.*]

POPE

[*In astonishment.*].

Can it be possible?

SWIFT

[*Bitterly.*]

'Twas Harley's plan;

For this he risks the name of honest man!

THE VOICE OF THE MAJOR-DOMO.

My Lord of Oxford! [*HARLEY, LORD OXFORD, enters.*]

SWIFT

[*Silencing POPE, who is about to speak.*].

Chut! he comes! Go, buy!

And see your Twick'nham villa to the sky

Tower a castle. Count your dividends

And your worst enemies, your dearest friends!

[SWIFT leaves POPE, with a nod, goes rapidly to LORD OXFORD, takes his arm and leads him off to the music-room conversing earnestly. More GUESTS follow.]

LADY TOPINOTT

[With CLARISSA, LUCINDA, and other LADIES].

Ay, Madam, beggared!

LUCINDA.

La! Belinda poor!

CLARISSA

[With ill-disguised triumph].

What ups and down the world sees, to be sure.

LUCINDA

[Curiously].

What will she do now, Ma'am?

LADY TOPINOTT.

Remain with me

I need a *demoiselle de compagnie*!

CLARISSA.

How nice for her!

LADY TOPINOTT.

I give two monthly crowns
And the reversion of my cast-off gowns!

CLARISSA

[Tittering].

O, Lud!

THE OTHER LADIES

[Tittering].

Te-hee!

POPE

[To himself].

Come, my Belinda, come!
Dazzle all eyes, and strike detractors dumb!

THE MAJOR-DOMO.

Lord Petre!

POPE.

Ha!

CLARISSA

[Ecstatically].

The conquering hero!

[LORD PETRE enters. He wears a suit of white watered silk, diamond shoe and knee buckles and his Orders. His hair, which is now the same length behind as at the sides, has been carefully curled and powdered. His air is crestfallen and conscious, and he manifests great reluctance to turn his back to anybody.]

POYNTZ

[*Aside to POPE*].

'Fegs!

A conqueror with his tail between his legs!

POPE

[*In the same tone*].

What has befallen since we parted?

ALL THE LADIES

[*Rapturously*].

Hail!

Knight of the Scissors!

[*Curtseying*.]

PETRE

[*Sheepishly, bowing*].

Ladies!

POYNTZ

[*To POPE*].

What can ail

Him? Dost thou note the sheepish, bleating air,
The conscious blush—?

DAPPERWIT

[*Getting behind LORD PETRE*].

Hey?

PETRE

[*Turning quickly on his heel*].

What?

LUCINDA.

Lud! [*Screaming*]. WHERE'S HIS HAIR?

POPE.

How now?

POYNTZ.

A crop?

[*Exclamations*.]

PETRE

[*Affecting indifference and taking snuff*].

The latest Paris style!

ALL THE LADIES
 [In a cluster, giggling].

Tee-hee!

ALL THE GENTLEMEN

[In a row, nudging each other and chuckling].

Ho, ho!

POYNTZ.

Ha, ha!

PETRE
 [To CLARISSA].
 I see you smile!

Why, Sir—!

[Breaking down in laughter, she hides her face behind her fan.]

LUCINDA.

Why, Sir—!

[Breaking down.]

THE OTHER LADIES.

Sir—! [Breaking down.]

ALL THE GENTLEMEN, except LORD PETRE

[Spluttering with laughter].

Pouf!

POPE
 [Controlling his amusement].

A charming mode!

The inventor's name?

THE MAJOR-DOMO

[Beyond the doors, announcing].

Mistress Fermor!

PETRE

[To himself].

The toad!

Sir, [To POPE, maintaining his composure with difficulty]
 I am told. . . . Ahem!

[Coughing and stammering.]
 'Tis whispered that

[BELINDA enters behind LORD PETRE. She is resplendently attired, wears all her jewels, and is radiant with triumph. Her hair is dressed high and powdered.]

They call this latest coiffure—

BELINDA.

TIT FOR TAT!

PETRE

[*Spinning round*].

So, Madam!

[*Furiously*.]

BELINDA.

[*Defiantly*].

So, Sir!

BELINDA and LORD PETRE confront each other, glaring. The other GUESTS gather about the belligerents in a delighted semicircle.

POYNTZ

[*Amused*].

Worry, Vixen! Loo!

DAPPERWIT

[*Pulling out a betting-book*].

'Ts't! Shake her, Towzer!

[*He bets on the event with POYNTZ*.]

POPE.

'Odsbods! here's to do!

PETRE.

Thou Gorgon!

BELINDA.

Monster!

PETRE.

Woman! angel-fair

As thou art fiendish—give me back my hair!

[*A shout of laughter from POPE, POYNTZ, and all the LISTENERS.*]

BELINDA

[*Proudly*].

When you restore the lock you stole from me!

[*LORD PETRE produces BELINDA's lock. Another explosion of mirth.*]

Exchange, my lord, I deem no robbery!

[*Another burst of laughter as BELINDA draws from her corsage LORD PETRE's back hair, nicely tied up with a ribbon. The doors are thrown open.*]

MAJOR-DOMO

[*Announcing*].

His Highness, Prince Eugene!

[BELINDA and LORD PETRE hurriedly conceal their respective locks of hair. Sensation as THE DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY sweeps in, leaning upon the arm of PRINCE EUGENE. The PRINCE wears a brilliant military uniform, starred, and covered with Orders. His STAFF follow, with a train of NOTABILITIES splendidly attired. BELINDA and all the LADIES curtsey profoundly: POPE, LORD PETRE, and all the other GENTLEMEN bow. The PRINCE returns the salute and leads the DUCHESS off to the music-room, as the Orchestra and choir of voices attack the opening CHORUS of Handel's "Saint Cecilia." The STAFF and NOTABILITIES follow. POYNTZ and LUCINDA, DAPPERWIT and CLARISSA, and other LADIES and GENTLEMEN follow also. The doors close; only permitting the music to be heard at intervals and faintly. BELINDA, LORD PETRE, and POPE remain the sole occupants of the room.]

BELINDA

[To POPE].

Your arm, Sir!

PETRE.

[Desperately interposing].

Stay!

Madam, for you must hear me!

BELINDA
[Haughtily].

Must I?

POPE
[Entreatingly].

Pray!

BELINDA
[Turning her eyes away].

Well, Sir?

PETRE

[His eyes fixed on the ground.]

If, through my lack of chivalry
Your pride has suffered, and your vanity—

BELINDA.

You charge me with the fault I most disdain :
 Whatever else I am—I am not vain !
 Not vain, thank Heaven ! my lord, yet if I were,
 I were not vain, to glory in my hair,
 Or deem that man who shall a lock obtain
 From me, will have some reason to be vain !

[As LORD PETRE, *conscience-stricken*, draws forth
 the lock with the evident intention of restoring
 it.]

Nay, Baron, keep the lock ? As fairy gold
 Crumbles to earth in a mere mortal's hold,
 Such trophies, won without a lady's will,
 Remain, in spite of all, the lady's still !
 Boast of your triumph then : I shall not deign

[*Volubly.*]

To contradict, protest, implore, arraign !
 I will not speak one single word, I vow,
 But remain speechless : dumb, as I am now !
 I will expire, I say ! and not complain,
 Rather than slanderous tongues should term me vain !
 Vain I am not ! yet if 'tis vanity
 To think a man might thank his stars for me
 Dowerless, landless, *sans* a penny-piece,
 Without a rag save my—[*confused*]—my—what you
 please !—
 Yet hold himself a highly-favored swain—

[*Sweeping a curtsey.*]

Then, if your lordship chooses, I am vain !

PETRE

[*Eagerly.*].

Thou peerless creature ! Hear me— !

BELINDA

[*Beginning to tremble.*].

One word yet,
 And then we part. . . . Would we had never met !
 That I repaid your wrong with injury,
 Blame all the outraged of my sex in me !

[*Struggling with tears,*]

You vowed you loved me, Sir, and I believed
 And gave you all the heart you have deceived.

You seemed so ardent, so sincere; you know
 The look that thrilled, the tone that rang most true:
 I worshipped you as something half-divine. . . .
 Heaven launched the bolt that broke my idol's shrine...
 It was my gold my lover loved, not Me!
 Conceive my grief, my shame, my misery...
 My deep humiliation, bitter pain,
 And ask yourself, my lord, if I was vain?

[*Sobbing and overcome, BELINDA turns away, leaning for support upon the back of a high chair near the fireplace. There is a moment's silence.*]

PETRE.

What is pure love, if 'tis not what I know
 Now, when I gaze on thee, dissolved in woe?

POPE.

Pilate asked what is Truth? This questioning Age
 Would learn what Love is?

PETRE.

Canst thou teach it, Sage?

POPE.

I can, my lord. That mutual tenderness
 Which seeks to give the more and not the less!
 That passion which survives the loss of wealth,
 Friends, honors, reputation, hope and health;
 This, this is Love! That glowing, lambent fire
 Which still burns on when Age has quenched Desire,
 That faithful ardor which new charms can trace
 Ev'n in the wrinkles of a worshipped face...
 If such a heav'n-born flame you cherished, Sir,
 Would you not bless the God who gave you her?

[*Pointing to BELINDA.*]

Defy a sneering world! throw down the glove!
 And challenge Time and Death to conquer Love?

PETRE

[*In a low tone, looking keenly in POPE's face.*].
 You have betrayed yourself. You love her!

POPE

[Glancing fearfully towards BELINDA].

Hush!

Nor put my pained remembrance to the blush.

[Almost wildly.]

There was an hour—a mad, forgetful hour,
When the dwarfed cripple, swayed by Passion's power—

PETRE.

Spoke? Told her all?

POPE

[Sadly and bitterly].

Ah, no! It came to pass

We stood together near a looking-glass,
I saw myself reflected by her side—

The contrast pierced and Aspiration died!

Now, I am wedded to an ancient flame,

[In answer to LORD PETRE'S look of inquiry.]
The Muse! She bears me babes that are not lame!

[With forced cheerfulness of tone and manner, looking from LORD PETRE, who stands motionless with bent head, to BELINDA'S heaving shoulders and averted face.]

Silent, my lord? [Taking snuff.] Belinda, too, is dumb?
Neither appeased; both still indignant? Come!

[Going to BELINDA, he takes her hand, and leads her towards LORD PETRE. She submits, keeping her head still obstinately turned away.]

Exchange these locks, and without more ado!

[To LORD PETRE.]

Give her her hair, and she shall render you
Your own!

[BELINDA, with averted face and manifest reluctance, draws LORD PETRE'S hair from her bosom, as LORD PETRE slowly and unwillingly takes the lock from his vest.]

PETRE

[With a loud sigh].

Heigho!

[He extends the lock without looking at BELINDA.]

BELINDA

[With a faint sigh].

Heigho!

[Extending the hair without looking at LORD PETRE.]

POPE

[Peeping slyly in their averted faces].

A double sigh?

Nor Roe nor Doe are willing to comply!

Let me suggest a plain arrangement which

May prove more fair and feasible to each!

[With a twinkle in his eye.]

Keep you the lock, Sir! cherish it, or burn

As you see fit. You, Madam, in your turn

Retain that hair, do with it as you will!

'Odsbods! Both parties glum and silent still...

Take then these ebon hairs, this chestnut curl

[Gently joining the hands of LORD PETRE and
BELINDA.]

Enclose them in one shrine of gold and pearl,

And leave the legend and the locket to

Your children!

PETRE

[To BELINDA].

Answer: I implore of you!

BELINDA

[Faltering].

Baron—!

PETRE

[Sinking on his knee].

I ask you not to love me—yet!

But O. forget what Love would most forget!

Remember, love, what Love would most recall,

And let a woman's pity cover all!

[Twelve o'clock chimes from the clock on the man-
tel-shelf.]

BELINDA.

Alas, my lord, my poverty!

PETRE

[With passionate tenderness, still kneeling].

That which

Hath made thee poor, sweet Heart, shall make me rich!

POPE.

It has, my lord !

PETRE

[*Rising.*]

Sir?

POPE.

Surely, as the clock

Struck twelve ! There is a rise in South Sea stock !

PETRE.

I hold ten thousand shares !

POPE.

Sell out. Invest !

Let Harley and the devil take the rest !

Calm and contented live out all your life,

Favored by Fortune, happy in a wife,

[The strains of the fairy harps are heard. The figures in the Watteau picture are mysteriously endowed with life and movement. They are no longer swains and shepherdesses, but have assumed the forms of the SYLPHS. Gradually increasing in size, they fill the picture-frame and encroach beyond its limits.]

If to whose share some female errors fall,

*[Tenderly lifting BELINDA's hand
to his lips.]*

Look in her face, and you'll forget 'em all !

[Soft strains of harp music, gradually swelling. As POPE limps slowly towards the door, BELINDA sinks upon the ottoman. LORD PETRE, kneeling beside her, clasps her in his arm, her face droops downwards until her lips meet his.]

Ah ! happy maid !

[Pausing and looking back, with wistful sadness.]

Happy, thrice happy swain !

Love on : I go my way in lonely pain ;

Heaven has so willed : 'tis the Divine decree —

Roses for you, and only thorns for me !

[The harp music swells to a triumphant crescendo.]

THE SYLPHS.

Poet !

POPE

[*Pausing.*]

What voices call?

[*He stands lost in wonder and astonishment, as from the Watteau picture the SYLPHS enter in a stately procession. They are attired as before, but wear garlands and carry long-stalked roses, tall lilies, and other flowers with petals of light, as walking-sticks. CRISPISSA, MOMENTILLA, ZEPHYRETTO, TASSELLIO, and OTHERS advance and group themselves about the entwined lovers, who do not see them. ARIEL and BRILLIANTE move gently towards POPE.*]

Say, who are ye?

Ethereal beings born of Fantasy?

Dream-children, present to my waking eyes?

ARIEL.

Take thy pen, Poet!

BRILLIANTE.

Quickly and devise—

ARIEL.

A masterpiece for this, and every Time.

BRILLIANTE.

A wondrous broidery of cunning rhyme!

ARIEL.

Jewelled with sparkling wit...

BRILLIANTE.

Yet showing here

And there the pearly glimmer of a tear!

POPE

[*With a sudden inspiration.*].

It shall be done!

ARIEL AND BRILLIANTE.

Come, Poet!

[*They lead him to the chair at the writing-table.*

ARIEL arranges paper before him. BRILLIANTE places the pen in his hand.]

POPE.

Numbers flow!

Ideas arrive and dazzling colors glow
Upon the palette of my mind.

BELINDA
 [Looking across to POPE.]
 You say?—

ARIEL

[As POPE is about to speak].

Let no rash word our presence here betray!
 To thee alone, O Poet! it is given
 To see what Shakespeare—

BRILLIANTE.

One Midsummer even

Saw in a Dream!

BELINDA.

Dear Poet, do you write

Another Pastoral for our delight?

PETRE.

Or a new Ode?

BELINDA.

Or ponder on the plan

Of your projected Essay upon Man?

POPE.

Woman's my theme!

BELINDA.

O!

POPE.

Madam, I aspire

To strike in praise of you my trembling lyre;
 Thus, in my verse, whilst living, shall be shrined
 The beauties of your person, and your mind!
 So, when fair suns shall set, as set they must,
 And that beloved head lies low in dust,
 One lock the Muse shall consecrate to Fame
 And midst the stars inscribe BELINDA's name!

PICTURE.—BELINDA and PETRE together. THE SYLPHS
*lovingly clustered round POPE, who is absorbed in
 composition at the writing-table.*

CURTAIN.

SECOND PICTURE.—ARIEL, BRILLIANTE, and the
 SYLPHS, *retiring, wave farewell to POPE with their
 fairy flowers, laying their fingers on their pursed-up
 lips to enjoin secrecy. LORD PETRE and BELINDA
 are together, POPE still at table writing busily.*

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